Wolfenberg

William Black

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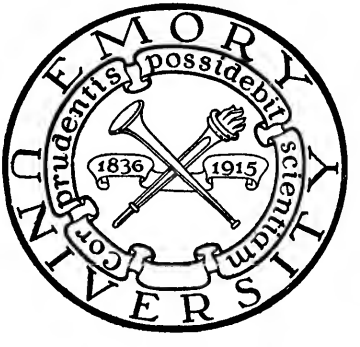

WOLFENBERG

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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WOLFENBERG.

CHAPTER I.

IN A BAZAAR.

Now it is impossible that sunrise on the coast of Asia Minor can be very different from sunrise anywhere else; yet nevertheless this is what we beheld, looking shorewards about six in the morning: a sky of pale, translucent silver-grey, a sea almost as pale but faintly touched with azure, and then, between those two worlds of wan and ethereal hue, the land —beach, houses, hills, and woods—all of a solid, deep, rich bronze-red. It was a marvel, a bewilderment of colour.—But here was Peggy coming briskly along the deck.

"Quick!" said she. "You can read it before any one turns up—and of course it is a secret. She finished it only yesterday—she has not been writing much of late—she has been so upset over the loss of Phaon. But this is something, I can tell you—"

A piece of paper changed hands; it was a document the handwriting of which was easily recognizable, even if there could be any doubt about the authorship of these savage stanzas—

Black ravens croak above the wood:
(*Pile high the blazing fire!*)
Sir Hugh lies weltering in his blood.
(*White heats of wild desire!*)

Loud laughs his dame: her fierce eyes shine:
(*Pile high the blazing fire!*)
Her leman laps the luscious wine.
(*White heats of wild desire!*)

'Demon and lover, tell me true
(*Pile high the blazing fire!*)
Where met ye, then, the red Sir Hugh?'
(*White heats of wild desire!*)

'Down by the bitter banks of Cart:
(*Pile high the blazing fire!*)
Three daggers quiver in his heart.'
(*White heats of wild desire!*)

'For this one night, I trow it well,
(*Pile high the blazing fire!*)
Our souls will shriek in deepest hell.'
(*White hearts of wild desire!*)

"Yes?" said Peggy, with professed anxiety.

"Did you ever hear of 'The Twa Corbies'?"

"Oh, how atrociously mean!" she cried. "This is the critic all over! You can't deny that the thing is just splendid; and so you must suggest that she borrowed the idea from somewhere. I never heard of 'The Twa'—'The Twa'—what?—and I am certain Miss Penguin never heard of it either. Why will literary people be so spiteful?—"

At this point she was interrupted—and had to thrust the paper dexterously into her pocket. It was Mrs. Threepenny-bit who appeared at the head of the companion, and with her was Ernest Wolfenberg. These two were talking together as they came along: it was only the last fragment or two of their conversation that reached us.

"Did you hear whether Amélie proposed

going back to America?" he asked, with his eyes bent on the deck. "Or—or are they going to settle in Europe—after the marriage?"

"Oh, I don't in the least know," she answered him. "I should very much doubt whether anything of the kind has been arranged as yet. But you will hear from herself. Now that the ice has been broken, there is no cause for any shyness on her part. And of course you will give her your congratulations——"

"Oh, yes, of course I must do that," he said, rather absently. "Of course—naturally—the first opportunity—perhaps when I see her to-day." After that, silence.

But indeed there was nothing of the kill-joy about this man as we proceeded to get ashore, on our way to Broussa. Grave and reserved he was, but not beyond his wont; in fact, at times there was even a sort of assumed and resolute cheerfulness in his manner. In the squalid main thoroughfare of the little village

he stood apart somewhat, regarding with interest the costumes of the inhabitants and the droves of small donkeys bearing panniers filled with vintage-grapes; he listened to the bargainings for a carriage; he was even amused by the unexpected apparition of Julian Verrinder, mounted on a somewhat sorry steed, and yet valiantly offering to be our escort. Did not we know that this part of the coast swarmed with brigands? Had we not heard of the two merchants of Broussa who had recently been carried off and held to ransom? The Baby, who had considerately insisted on getting up beside the driver of the carriage, so that we should have Wolfenberg along with us, overheard all this, and looked admiring and grateful thanks with her big, gentle eyes. It was a pity that Rosinante had not a more gallant look: the young man was well enough.

Our route at first lay through interminable groves of mulberry, olive, and cypress; but

by-and-by we had to face a long and gradual ascent that in course of time brought us spacious views both by land and sea. Of course this was all collar-work for the hapless horses; so the driver, having fastened the reins, amused himself by making a series of incursions into the neighbouring thickets and vineyards, returning with armfuls of quinces and grapes (the former with branch and leaf) which he politely presented to the three ladies. It was a friendly little act; and no doubt they would have liked to enter into conversation with him in return, but that they had already discovered it was of no use trying anything of the kind. We observed that he was particularly careful in selecting uninjured bunches of grapes to offer to his gentle neighbour on the box-seat; it was the old story; innocent and amiable eyes can work wonders anywhere —even when no speech is possible.

We ascended to a great height, and eventually looked abroad over an immense and

fertile plain, with, far beyond it, the vast and shadowy bulk of Mount Olympus rising into the pale summer sky. Then, after a considerable rest on the summit, we began the descent —a process that speedily became a headlong downward rush, the horses at full gallop, the carriage pitching and swaying and swinging, the dust rolling away in volumes. Indeed we had grown so little familiar with such pranks and antics on board the staid and demure *Orotania* that now, in solely devoting ourselves to clinging on to this vehicle gone daft, we somehow lost sight of Julian Verrinder altogether. Had our cavalier been spirited away by the very brigands with whom he had threatened us; or was it those envious clouds of dust that hid him from the Baby's wistful eyes? For our own part we could only clutch on to the sides of this unholy craft, that rolled and flung and swung us about, in a sea far rougher than any we had encountered since leaving England; until, at long and length,

we began to draw near the plain; then a grey horseman became occasionally visible through the clouds; finally a halt was called in the welcome shade of a grove of tall chestnuts, where there was a small wayside caravanserai and water for the animals; and here the Baby was at last assured that her lover had not been carried off by any ruthless Turks.

From this resting-place onwards to Broussa it seemed to us that we were driving through a perpetual and magnificent garden, the rich green vegetation of which was especially grateful to eyes long accustomed to the colours of the sea. A most fertile and busy land; luxuriant maize, figs, mulberries, tobacco, and olives; groups of brightly-dressed peasants at work in the fields as if they had just stepped out of an opera; oxen and buffaloes toiling along the dusty road with waggons of merchandise; droves of camels at their midday encampment: it was altogether a varied and interesting scene, and a sufficient distraction

for any of us who may have been looking forward, with some little apprehension, to a certain meeting. Then Broussa itself: domes, minarets, villas perched high on the terraced slopes of Olympus, among abundant verdure: this also seemed a place of cheerful aspect. We drove up to the hotel; there were one or two Orotanians loitering about the steps, and from them we learned that there was some kind of luncheon going forward; we should find our friends upstairs. We entered; ascended the wide staircase to the first floor; and here a din of voices immediately told us where our shipmates were assembled.

It was a long and lofty apartment, with a table coming right down the centre; and this table, at a first glance, seemed to be quite sufficiently occupied. Wolfenberg shrank back a little.

"No," he said, "I don't like going in amongst so many—we should only inconvenience them—cannot we get a room to ourselves?"

But during that second of hesitation the small group at the door had been observed; and the next instant there came quickly along the chamber, from the very furthest end of it, a young lady of impetuous mien and carriage, with delight and welcome and reproach all shining and smiling in her lustrous black eyes. She carried us away in a whirlwind of words. We were the most mysterious people! Why had we not driven out the previous afternoon, like everybody else? But now there were some places, up by herself and her mamma; she would secure them for us; she would make way. Then she turned to Wolfenberg—who had been rather in the background, regarding her.

"Ernest," said she, holding out her hand (and there was something of a shy flush on her cheek), "I have not said good-morning to you yet. It was too bad of you not to come along yesterday——"

He took her hand, and held it for a brief moment.

"I was told something last night, Amélie," he said, in his grave and simple way. "My congratulations—my best wishes."

There was a quick look of pleasure and pride in her eyes.

"Oh, if you only knew!—But another time, Ernest." And therewithal she swept the little party of new-comers with her into the room; and marched at the head of them, with unusual colour and animation in her face; and in a tempestuous sort of way she would make room for them. Even when we had all got places with sufficient ease, she seemed excitedly anxious to talk, and entertain, and amuse. Then she would have Paul Hitrovo do this and do that; until he, with great good-nature, seeing that the few waiters were not capable of coping with this influx of strangers, got up from his chair and formally constituted himself the squire of these dames. But it was Wolfenberg's glass that Amélie Dumaresq filled first—she poured the wine out with her own hands.

Then, again, directly after luncheon, she would have us go to look at the mosques and the bazaars, firing the imagination of our womankind with wonderful tales of the startling colours of the Broussa silks. Yet somehow or other, as soon as we were outside, it was to Wolfenberg she chiefly addressed herself. It was to him she pointed out the Elizabethan-looking houses of beams and plaster, with their red-tiled roofs, and their projecting upper storey, supported by carved woodwork. It was his attention she drew to the strange green twilight formed at the entrance to the bazaars by the over-arching trellises hanging with vines. And when she had conducted her friends to certain stalls, and set them on to inspect the rich stores of wares and fabrics, then she seemed to think she had done her part; she turned to Wolfenberg, and claimed him altogether; she and he stood a little way out of the stream of traffic, by themselves.

These Broussa labyrinths have not the mysterious austerity of many Eastern bazaars; they are more modern, and brisk, and busy; and the noise and clatter, especially in the neighbourhood of the iron-workers' shops, are indescribable. In this turmoil and confusion there was better opportunity for confidences between those two than in the silence of mid-ocean; and although no word could be overheard by any one but themselves, it was easy to see what an eager story she had to tell. Eager and yet shy—a broken story—sometimes her face was timidly downcast. We noticed, too, another onlooker—the anxious mother. She did not dare to intervene. She pretended to be interested in those gauzy silken neckerchiefs and Turkish dressing-gowns. But we could guess that she was secretly and wholly rejoiced to see in what a kindly and encouraging way Wolfenberg appeared to receive those confessions; he would still be the friend and confidant of both

mother and daughter; either could go to him in time of need. *Ding-ding! tack, tack, tack!* went the hammers of the iron-workers; swarthy merchants, perched high on their stalls, shook out their gay stuffs, and vociferously called for custom; beggars, old and young, extended skinny palms, and whined; the drivers of the heavily-laden pack-mules urged forward the slow-swaying beasts through the unwilling throng. And amid these surroundings—as we conjectured—a love-tale was told.

But they could not remain thus dissociated for ever; and, indeed, an incident now occurred that not only restored Amélie Dumaresq to her companions, but was like to have had evil consequences for all of us. There came along, accompanied by a soldier armed with musket and bayonet, an official of some sort who carried in his hand a formidable-looking whip of several tails; and with this weapon he served out rough-and-

ready punishment as the occasion required. To us he seemed somewhat indiscriminate in his procedure; it may be that he recognised old offenders; or perhaps he merely hit out here and there at random to keep things going, for there were many loiterers and beggars, and the ways were narrow. There was not much brutality; we observed that when he struck at a woman, it was generally about the skirts; only it is not pleasant to see a man flogging a woman, in whatever fashion. But, as bad luck would have it, just as he came by our group of folk, he caught sight of a little old creature who had doubtless been guilty of some delinquency; he brought the lash smartly across her shoulders; and the poor old woman, with a whimpering cry, fled hurriedly away. Now it was no business of ours to interfere; each country has its own laws and customs; besides—we were in Asia Minor. But Amélie Dumaresq was far too impulsive and firm-nerved to take any such

considerations into account; she stepped straight up to the man—the blood all gone from her face; she snatched the whip out of his hand, and dashed it on the ground; while she gave him of her mind freely, in voluble and indignant French. The tall and grave official probably did not understand one of these scathing and scornful words. He appeared to be neither astonished nor angry. He looked at her, with his dark lack-lustre eyes. Then he looked at us one by one. And at the same moment—indeed, it all happened in a moment—Paul Hitrovo had stepped forward to intervene and apologise; he lifted and restored the whip, with further apologies and explanations—all in French; while it is highly probable that he may have employed another and more intelligible language (for the *medjidieh* is persuasive, and half-a-dozen of them carry weight); at all events the awarder of stripes, having again regarded us with his cold and sullen eye, went on his way.

"Amélie, how could you be so mad!" the frightened mother exclaimed. But the daughter was not frightened: her pale lips were still proud and indignant.

"I think," said Paul Hitrovo, grimly, as he regarded the retreating officer, "we might as well clear out of this place before he has had time to change his mind. If you ladies have completed your purchases—well, you might come and see the tiles in the Green Mosque."

It was not until the afternoon of the following day, as we were driving back to Moudanieh, that we learned something of what Amélie Dumaresq had confided to Wolfenberg in the bazaars of Broussa.

"She is simply over-brimming with happiness," he said.

"Did she tell you whether she had entirely given up her art schemes?" asked Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with a certain chilliness of manner. "Did she say anything about a

studio in London—in conjunction with you? Or is that all abandoned?"

"She seems to have no projects," he answered her, simply enough. "She is overwhelmed by this new and wonderful thing; she can think of nothing else. For hers is a strong nature: whatever interests her interests her wholly."

"Yet she seems to be able to change her views of life and her own plans without much trouble," observed his friend—who was thinking of him far more than he was thinking of himself, we made sure.

"It is her intense absorption in the present moment that enables her to do that," said this unshaken champion. "It has always been like that with Amélie. What immediately surrounds her is of the first and last importance; she becomes wholly preoccupied and engrossed. Then everything is so real to her; she grasps it; she has no doubt or hesitation——"

"What about marriage being the great disillusioniser?" said the other, vindictively. "I thought that was one of her theories."

"Yes," said he in reply, but rather wincing. "One of her theories—yes. But when the great facts and experiences of life come along, then theories have to be put aside: it is the way of the world."

He spoke without bitterness; nay, with a certain serenity that might have led one to suppose he had heard nothing but the best of news; and despite the small sub-acid remarks of the woman opposite him, he would have nothing but commendation of Amélie's conduct and her choice. Sometimes his defence of her grew almost warm; he seemed to forget that it was solely on his own account that this not unsympathetic acquaintance of his was inclined to be resentful—far more deeply resentful and indignant, indeed, than she chose to reveal in words.

"And Mr. Hitrovo—what about him?" she

proceeded, in the remorseless way of women who have formed an unreasoning antipathy against any one. "What is the extraordinary attraction that has so captivated her? What is his character—his disposition—his particular quality of mind? I suppose you know Feuerbach's saying, that a being without attributes is non-existent: well, to me Mr. Hitrovo seems to be non-existent, except for a pair of clear eyes. Yes, he has those. And are they enough? I should have thought a girl of Amélie's strong judgment and literal intellect would have seen further than that—would have wanted something more than that——"

The grey, tired, pensive face coloured a little; he appeared embarrassed.

"You don't understand," he said. "You don't understand. He has been a stranger to us. He is naturally reticent—and perhaps a little indifferent about people with whom he is not on familiar terms—and it has happened, somehow, that we have not seen much of him

hitherto, or had much intercourse with him. But that must be no longer. Amélie spoke to me about it. She is especially anxious you should get to know him. And for me—well, I begin from to-morrow, if he will allow me. He is Amélie's choice: that is enough for me. And surely there is nothing against him from an outward point of view. His manners are most refined——"

"Oh, yes, refined: it may turn out that there is nothing gross about him except his liabilities," interposed Peggy, spitefully. Indeed it was a most ungracious thing to say, and not very witty either; but those two women seemed bent on bolstering each other up in their incurable dislike of this young Russian.

"Oh, as to that," said Wolfenberg, after a moment's hesitation, "I dare say that will turn out all right—if you mean money matters. He comes of a well-known family; he is in a good position. And—and—if he should have

no fortune—well, happily, Amélie can dispense with that. The Dumaresqs are rich enough."

"And about the story you heard at Constantinople?" she said, coldly.

"Why," he retorted, "if there had been anything seriously against him, do you think I should have been justified in concealing it from Amélie's mother—who had asked us to find out? There was nothing. An escapade—an accident. No, no," he went on (and to one of us he appeared to be labouring to convince himself) "I don't see why there should be any apprehension. All looks well. Amélie herself says you have only got to know him thoroughly. You can't expect a young man to produce vouchers for his character, or his disposition, or his circumstances, or anything of the kind. No doubt his family will come forward, on their side, when they hear of this engagement—"

"And in the meantime," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with a certain air of relief, "it will

be a great comfort to Mrs. Dumaresq that she can come and consult you about it. She has been very miserable—fearing the responsibility, and finding herself so much alone. She was thinking of telegraphing over to the girl's uncle, in Georgia, or Florida, or somewhere. But if you approve——"

"If I approve?" he repeated, and a curious half-startled expression crossed his face. Then he went on, in his usual calm and grave way: "It is not for me to approve. But I know something of Amélie; I have studied her a little; I have confidence in her keen perceptions and in her fearless judgment. She is not one likely to be blinded easily. And so far I approve—so far I am entirely hopeful—so far I think all is well."

This, and much more to the same effect, he said as we were slowly climbing the long mountain-side and then swinging down the rough descent to Moudanieh. It was of her always he spoke: there had not been one

word of reference to himself or his own poor affairs.

On arriving at the village we ran against the Major, who seemed to be in a sad predicament. He was on foot and surrounded by a small circle of tobacco-complexioned Greeks, while one tall fellow, who appeared to be a driver, was pressing forward upon him with three fingers uplifted. But it turned out that this was no threatening gesture; it was only his method of emphasising the only French phrase he seemed to have at his command.

"Trois napoléons — trois napoléons!" he kept repeating—with the three fingers in staring evidence.

On the other hand, the Major, whose thick-set frame and roseate face made him look singularly English amongst this sallow crowd, was bursting over with rage and broken French.

"Trois napoléons?—allez au diable avec votre trois napoléons!—je n'ai jamais dit rien

de trois napoléons!—huit *medjidiehs,* comme les autres — Trois napoléons? — vous êtes menteur: comprenez vous cela?—vous m'avez dit 'Combien de piastres?'; j'ai vous dit 'Pas de piastres: huit *medjidiehs,* comme les autres.' Et pas un autre farthing—d—n your eyes, you impudent scoundrel!"

When our women-folk alighted, the Major was kind enough to moderate his language; though he continued to protest that not one farthing more would he give than the sum agreed upon by the dragoman who had engaged all the carriages.

"Lure that man out with us to the ship," one managed to say to him, privately. "Wait till Sadoolah, or Yadoolah, or whatever his name is, comes on board. Confront them with each other in the awful presence of the Purser. Then there will be an end."

There was, as it turned: an end short and summary; but Sappho, who later on came to hear of the incident, went about the ship

lamenting that the Turks had not shut up a certain 'brute' and 'fiend' in one of their most loathsome prisons, and whipped him with knotted whips.

We sailed about six o'clock, steaming out into the Sea of Marmora as the dusk fell. When we came on deck after dinner, the moon was shining full and clear, and a broad lane of silver trembled on the placid waters. And perhaps the calm beauty of the night had something to do in assuaging the nervous fears of this anxious mother, who now came along to our favourite corner, bringing with her Wolfenberg. She was more cheerful in tone and manner; and she seemed greatly pleased to find that she could now talk to him freely and openly, and that he had nothing for her but the most confident of assurances and forecasts.

"I can hardly believe you are Amélie's mother," said he, with some pretence of laughing at her lingering doubts. "Where did

she get all her courage, her splendid audacity?"

"She is young," said the poor mother, wistfully; "and I am alone. If she were to take it into her head to live in Russia, what would become of me?"

"She won't live in Russia," said he, bluntly.

"She is mad about everything Russian."

"Why not?"

"You would think there was nothing like Russian music, Russian literature, Russian character; and what if she were suddenly to determine to go and live in the country?"

There were two women listening in silence to all this; and one of them was saying to herself—'Oh, yes, you are her mother; there is not the least doubt about the relationship. Here you are talking to your best and nearest friend about a great change in all your circumstances, affecting him quite as much as it affects you; but there is not a word about his plans, his future; it is only about your

daughter you are concerned, and about yourself. There is a strong family likeness between two women who could throw over a man in that fashion, without a thought that was not centred on themselves. And why is he not shocked by such a display of ingratitude? What is it blinds him? What infatuation possesses him that at one time his sole and absorbing interest in the world seems to be that girl's career as an artist; and then, when she abruptly abandons it, he defends her, he welcomes the change—welcomes anything that approves itself to her. And yet they say that unselfish devotion is no longer known in these days!"

It was at this juncture that Amélie herself chose to pay us a brief visit: she came swiftly and lightly along the deck; and there was a happy and affectionate radiance in her eyes as she slipped down beside her mother and put her arm round her waist.

"Matushka," she said, complainingly, "it is

very hard: every one seems willing to hear me sing except the little mother. Won't you come down into the saloon, for five minutes? I am going to try the 'Cossack's Lullaby'; and it sounds so pretty in the Russian; and Paul says I pronounce very well——"

"Amélie!" Mrs. Dumaresq protested, with some petulance. "Why should any one sit in the saloon on a night like this!"

The girl laid her head against her mother's cheek and fondled the other cheek with her disengaged hand.

"Now don't be angry—don't be angry," she said, in coaxing tones. "So you would rather have the moonlight? Very well—very well—who can wonder? Matushka, was there ever such a marvellous voyage? There never was such a voyage before; there never will be such another; all the beautiful things in Europe crowded into it; and continuous splendid summer days and magical nights. Well, there," she said, as she released her arm

and sprang gaily to her feet, "I will leave you to your silver seas. But mind you, Matushka, don't you sit up late—and mind you don't catch cold."

And away she went again, with light and joyous steps, along the intervening space of moonlit deck. Wolfenberg's eyes followed her.

"She seems simply palpitating with happiness," he said. "And that is as it should be."

CHAPTER II.

OVER A VOLCANO.

NEXT morning found us opposite the yellow-brown plains of Troy and the odd little wind-mills; on our right was Tenedos, with its small red town and more wind-mills; around us, the blue Ægean. It was a day that opened under fair auspices: it ended—in sadder fashion.

What struck us most, as we were sailing away down to Cape Baba and the shores of Mitylene, was the undaunted cheerfulness maintained by Wolfenberg, in view of all these recent disclosures. You would have thought that everything had turned out just as he had planned and desired. He made open profession of acquaintanceship with Hitrovo,

walking up and down with him, chatting and laughing; and Amélie Dumaresq seemed pleased to see those two together. When he talked to Mrs. Dumaresq, he had nothing but the most confident assurances about the young Russian, and praise of his appearance, his manner, his serenity of temper, his air of good breeding. All was going well and as it should be—because of Amélie's obvious happiness.

"And never a thought about himself!" said Lady Cameron, almost bitterly, to her usual confidante. Then she went on: "But I have been thinking about him. And I am quite of your opinion: we ought not to let a man like that, simply through his own unselfishness, be thrown aside in any such cold-blooded fashion. What does he mean to do when he returns to London? Do you think he would care to pay a visit to Inverfask? Ewen is almost sure to meet us at Malta; and he would be delighted with such a companion; Mr. Wolfenberg could go right on with us. And fancy what a revela-

tion the West Highlands would be to him—the mysterious loneliness of them, the remoteness, and wildness. You know, Missis, I've had some little experience of the West Highlands now; and in settled fine weather, when we do happen to get such a thing, they come away down and down, and down and down, until they might be Lake George, or Windermere, or Killarney, or anything; then of a sudden the raging Atlantic gales are upon us, and the whole place is whirled clean away out of the reach of the ordinary landscape-painter. But if a man like Wolfenberg were to see the mists, and the fearful gloom, and the blazes of light and colour——"

"Well, here he is coming along, Peggy," observed her companion. "Why don't you ask him at once?"

Amélie Dumaresq was with him: she had intercepted him, for some reason or another.

"Oh, Mr. Wolfenberg," said Lady Cameron, a little timidly, as those two drew nigh, "we

have just been talking about the West Highlands—and—and artists all say that October is the finest month for colour—and I was wondering whether you could be persuaded to come and stay with us at Inverfask for a while—just as long as you found the neighbourhood interesting. I expect my husband to join the ship at Malta; and we might all go on together, when we reach England, if that suited your arrangements. I don't know whether you have anything to detain you in London——"

Here she stopped. She could see that he was looking embarrassed; and indeed there was some touch of colour in the pale and refined face as he answered her implied question.

"No, I have made no very definite plans," he said, evasively. Then he turned to his companion: "There are your drawings, Amélie—the exhibition: we must not abandon that. At least," he continued, with a certain

diffidence: "I assume that you still mean to carry out that idea. It would be a pity to abandon it. I should like you to come before the English public—I know how you would be received—I feel sure of it."

Curiously enough, before replying she glanced quickly across the ship's deck towards Paul Hitrovo, who was at the opposite rail, rolling a cigarette.

"I—I am not sure," she said, with downcast eyes. "I think I had forgotten about it. And perhaps—perhaps, after all, it would be better to leave that aside. I am not so anxious for the opinion of the public. It was your opinion, Ernest, and your constant backing me up, that made me dream about being an artist. And now—well—there are other things——" But here she broke away from all this pretty confusion, and proceeded to speak in the frank, downright impetuous fashion that was a good deal more natural to her. "Ernest, what is the use of your talking

about my wretched trash! If there is to be an exhibition at all, let it be, as I have insisted again and again, an exhibition of your collected works. That would be something—something noble and fine!—and whether you held it in London or New York, I think I should be there to see, no matter where I might have to come from! When you can bring together a series of great imaginative works like those that have won you your fame, what is the use of coming to me for my wretched little scraps and sketches from the Atelier Didron? No, no, Ernest; put that aside, at least in the meantime; and think of something more important—that is, if you are capable of thinking about anything connected with yourself for a single moment."

And with that she went away, for her mother had twice called her. Wolfenberg followed her with his large, grey, thoughtful eyes.

"I wonder if she means wholly to abandon

her art—to put it altogether aside—and for ever," he said, in profound meditation. "Perhaps she does not know the sacrifice she is making. Yet to have advanced so far—to have shown such power——"

He was silent. And for a second or two the friends who were with him rather held back from intrusion, knowing in what direction his thoughts were bent; but, presently, to divert his mind from that too sombre prospect, Peggy returned to her proposal that he should, on reaching England, go on with herself and her husband to Inverfask. It was a kindly and considerate suggestion on her part; but then we knew from of old that she was capable of such things.

"Why," she said to him, "you, of all people in the world, are just the one to understand thoroughly the mysterious charm and fascination of those remote islands. Shall I tell you how I got some small inkling of it myself—though I went there as a stranger? We have

a choir at Inverfask; and they practise in the Volunteers' Drill-Hall—a big, empty, wooden place; and one night my husband and I walked along to hear them. It was very dark; and we were cautious about the steps; and just as we got to the door, which was a little bit open, Ewen said to me 'Stop!—listen!—they are going to sing the Lament of Mac Crimmon.' So we stood there in the dusk; and the first thing we heard was the strangest sound—the voices of all the choir in a low, modulated murmur—it was like the wailing of wind round the shore—you seemed to be looking at a desolate island—with a grey sea all around it—and driving clouds and rain. I cannot tell you how inexpressibly sad and mournful it was; but all at once there was a woman's voice—high and clear—it was like some piteous cry of anguish—but softened by its being distant—away above the moaning of the wind and the sea. Indeed, the others had stopped now—there was but the

one voice—in the silence you could hear distinctly:

The mists are dark on Coolin's hill;
The banshee's cry is far and shrill;
Blue eyes may weep, fond hearts may yearn—
Mac Crimmon shall no more return.

And then all the other voices—the men's voices a deep bass—rose in refrain—so plaintive and sad—and yet so lofty and solemn—well, I know I was trembling from head to foot—

No more, no more, no more, Mac Crimmon!
No more, no more, no more, Mac Crimmon!

—that was the refrain—and it is impossible to describe the solemnity of it, and the mournfulness, and the way it sounded remote, as if it was all taking place among mists, and grey seas, and by lonely shores. Ewen wanted me to go in. I could not. I stood at the partly-opened door. And then they sang 'The Braes of Glen Braon.' Oh, that was worse!" said Peggy, with something

between a sob and a laugh. "That was worse. If you want to have your heart broken right away, get a Highland choir to sing 'The Braes of Glen Braon'!"

He had been following every word with rapt attention: we could see by his eyes how his imagination had been aroused.

"Yes," he said, "I should like to visit those islands—and I can imagine the music being a true key-note." Then his interest seemed to fall away. "But I hardly know yet what I may do. I have been absent a long time from my own country. Perhaps I should go back there—one owes a little gratitude to one's native soil."

"Amélie will be disappointed," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, regarding him, "if you do not have that exhibition of your pictures in England."

"Amélie?" said he. But he would speak no word that could be construed into any reflection upon her. "Oh, Amélie will have

plenty of interests," he said ; "why should she remember or care about a trifle like that ?"

And at lunch-time, again, he maintained that attitude of resolute optimism—to cheer and reassure those very friends of his who were forsaking him ; and now he no longer showed any hesitation about referring to Paul Hitrovo in their common talk.

"What do you say, Amélie," he asked, with grave irony, "of a young man whose chief ambition is to become a member of the Austro-Hungarian Jockey Club ?"

She laughed.

"What do I say ? Well, I say—why not ? Has he not got as good a name as any of them ? Very fine names, no doubt—grand names — Festetics — Esterhazy — Auersberg — Montenuovo—Batthyani : but which of them is a better name than his own ?" she demanded, proudly.

"To my mind," Wolfenberg said, turning to another subject that seemed to suggest itself

naturally enough, "Vienna is by far and away the most delightful city in Europe—I mean, to live in. Its appearance is so bright and cheerful—the streets spacious—the foliage in the public parks beautiful—the people gay, light-spirited, handsome—it is always Carnival-time in Vienna. It is true it has not got the art-treasures of Florence; but then it has not got the poisonous drainage of Florence. It has not got the sea-view of Naples; but then it has not got the squalor and beggary of Naples. It has not got the mysterious enchantment of Venice; but then it has not got the smells of Venice. No: to live in—for pleasant cheerfulness—for the enjoyment of life—for plenty of amusement, among well-bred, and handsome, and light-hearted people —I pronounce for Vienna!——"

The mother had overheard all this with ever-increasing alarm.

"Amélie," said she, "do you think of living in Vienna?"

The girl laughed again, and seemed to throw away the future from her by a little gesture of her finger-tips.

"Who knows, matushka?" she said, lightly. "These may be all châteaux en Espagne. But I wish you would make this wicked Ernest think more seriously about his exhibition in London: that is of much more importance."

After luncheon he disappeared, as also did young Verrinder and the timid and Juno-eyed damsel; so that we guessed the three of them were away after that mystic picture of the dawn that was partly to hide and partly to reveal a portrait. When Wolfenberg came on deck again, some two hours thereafter, it chanced that Lady Cameron was playing cribbage with the Major; and he seized this opportune moment to approach Mrs. Threepenny-bit.

"You can keep a secret well," he said, in a guarded voice, and with smiling eyes.

"In what way?" responded Mrs. Innocence.

"I have had a little confession made to me

this afternoon," he went on. "Well, of course I had guessed—more than guessed. If I had not been pretty sure, do you think I should have undertaken this sketch for them——"

"Oh, the sketch?—has Julian Verrinder said anything to you?" the small woman asked, in a vague kind of way.

"You need not be afraid: he told me you knew," Wolfenberg answered, with some little amusement over her hesitation. And then he proceeded with a kind of grave sympathy: "Indeed it has been very attractive to me—the occasional hour along there in the fore-saloon, with this pretty spectacle before my eyes all the time. Of course I knew; it was easy to guess; and there were no onlookers down there to disturb them. It was the world all grown young again—his care of her and constant solicitude; her timid deference towards him; and both of them thinking they were most cleverly concealing their tremendous secret. Well, it was gratitude opened the

young man's lips; it appears he thinks there is some kind of likeness; and he confided in me——"

"But why should the tremendous secret be confided first to one, and then to another, and not to the very person who has most right to know?" demanded this small creature, more in amazement than in anger. "Why does not that silly child go at once and tell her sister?"

"Well, there is some reason, too," he said, "as I gather from certain hints. She is very much afraid of being cross-examined as to how they met, and as to her position generally —she not yet knowing any one of his relatives, and so forth—indeed, I don't quite understand all their distresses and fears and complications; but I am informed that everything is to be put right at Malta."

"Oh, everything is to be put straight at Malta?" the other said, graciously. "And how is Malta going to make the difference?"

"Must I reveal all their plans and schemes?" he said, his raised eyebrows smiling an enquiry. But he continued, with much good-nature: he himself seemed interested in this screened and veiled little idyll. "Perhaps I cannot be quite positive about all the details of the plotting and contriving—for there was a good deal of shyness and embarrassment—but at least I know certain features of it. For example, when we were first at Constantinople, Miss Emily managed to get her photograph taken——"

"When she was ashore with Miss Penguin!"

"She managed it, anyhow; it was at Verrinder's urgent entreaty. Then when we came back from the Crimea, they found copies ready; and these were at once dispatched—to Verrinder's mother, and his sister, and his uncle. Now do you see where Malta comes in?"

"No, I don't," she answered, honestly.

"Why, by the time we get to Malta, letters

from England will have arrived there, in answer to those sent from Constantinople; and the uncle, and the mother, and the sister have all been implored to write prettily to the young lady who is about to enter their family. The photographs will have propitiated them—the big, soft eyes, the winning mouth, the ingenuous and innocent and appealing expression. No doubt his relatives over there know well enough that the young man is his own master, and that they may just as well approve his choice; still, the photographs are to bespeak favour; and very nice letters are sure to come to Malta; then Miss Emily, when she goes to tell her sister, will have documents in her hand to show that this is no hole-and-corner engagement, that everything is openly arranged and approved of, and that the Verrinder family are ready to receive her with open arms. What do you think?—a skilful little design, is it not?"

"It is a piece of childish absurdity!" she

said, sharply. "The girl ought to have gone straight to her sister, and told her, the moment she came on board."

But he, in his large toleration, took a more lenient view. The sight of those two young lovers together had pleased and interested him; their confiding to him their dark plans and stratagems was a still further claim; indeed so charmed was he with the society of these two young romancists that what was originally meant to be a sketch promised to become a much more elaborate affair before he had finished with it and them. Moreover he had his own secret; for neither of them knew that this drawing was to be a wedding-present.

But that night something happened that drove all those pretty trifles out of his head. After dinner he did not come on deck with us as was his wont; nor did he remain in the saloon with the Dumaresqs (there was to be some music); instead, he disappeared in the

direction of the smoking-room, along with Paul Hitrovo. We thought little of it at the time; for he had begun to make open show of his amicable relations with the young Russian; he seemed to wish everybody to understand that Amélie's fiancé must needs be his friend. We went on deck, well content, to seek out our accustomed haunt. It was a beautiful night—a clear moon shining on a quiet sea: an admirable night for getting away down through the sprinkled islands of the Archipelago.

It was late when he joined us; and instantly we saw that something had occurred; his face was curiously disturbed and anxious.

"I am glad you have not gone below," he said—and he spoke in a low voice, though there was no one near. "I must have counsel—I don't know what to do. And—perhaps I exaggerate: wherever Amélie is concerned, I may be stupidly nervous; and a little common-sense may put everything right."

He paused for a second. "Yes, it may be merely some morbid fancy—but it seems as if I had just stepped into a new-made grave."

His face looked strange in the moonlight. Then he appeared to make an effort to throw aside some feeling that was oppressing him.

"No, I must not, and will not believe it," he said, with his naturally firm lips tightening somewhat. "I am easily disquieted where Amélie is concerned; and that is a weakness that must be put aside; one might take example from herself—her splendid nerve and audacious courage. The fact is, I have just been having a long chat with Hitrovo—the first intimate conversation we have had; and he has been very frank. There it is, you see—his frankness—disturbing at the moment, but really hopeful; for if there were anything really evil about him there would be no concealment; he would be more specious: don't you think so?"

He was addressing himself more particularly to the elder of the two women; but what

could she say in answer to this incoherent appeal? It was clear enough that this man was being torn in two different directions: he had made some discovery that had alarmed him—and yet he was determined to see nothing of any moment in it.

"At the same time," he continued, as if in partial justification of himself, "it is a little startling when a young man begins to tell you, quite calmly and coolly, what he means to do with the fortune he counts on coming to him with his marriage. And that is what Hitrovo did—oh, yes—quite coolly and frankly!—no beating about the bush whatever. Race-horses he seems to have set his mind on chiefly—owning the horses—keeping up some kind of racing establishment, I suppose. He confessed to me that he had no money of his own—had run through it; and that it was absolutely necessary, if he married at all, that he should marry a woman with plenty of money. Then he began to ask me the extent of Amélie's

fortune; he appeared to assume that he would have entire control of it; indeed, he even suggested that he might have to impose conditions—as if he were being bought, and wanted the highest possible price for himself!"

But here he stopped; for his voice was beginning to vibrate with indignation. When he resumed, it was in quite a different key.

"After all," he said, "it may be only natural. I think the English and Americans look on marriage differently from the nations of continental Europe. On the Continent marriage is a provision and a settlement; and why should not a young man frankly tell you he has no money of his own; and why should not he look forward to an abundance of wealth that will benefit his wife as well as himself? As I say, it was merely that at first his honesty was a little startling; yet there is little need to protest against honesty—it is too uncommon. You see," he proceeded, with a sort of affectation of careless

equanimity, "if I did really think he was nothing but a fortune-hunter, I should be bound to go and warn Mrs. Dumaresq, and Amélie too. Don't you agree with me? I am their friend. They are women, alone, with no adviser to guide them. Wouldn't you say, now, that if I thought there was serious danger—if I thought Hitrovo's only notion in marrying Amélie was to get hold of her money to squander it on the Turf—I ought to go and warn her mother and herself?"

This was the counsel he had come for, evidently; but the wise, small creature whom he addressed knew better than to intervene at such a moment. The ways were all dark as yet. She was silent.

"Yes, if it were really so," he said, presently, with something more of sincerity, and even with some trace of agitation, in his voice, "it would be terrible. If it were so, and if Amélie were to make the discovery, it would

kill her. She is so passionately proud. And her heart is just filled with this new happiness; she says she knows what it is to live now; she says she is ready to part with all other illusions—but not with this one. And that also is to be considered: why should I seek to rob her of this great and absorbing happiness, even if I knew, or suspected, him to be unworthy of her?—"

She dared not answer. These questions that he asked her, with their infinite and unsearchable possibilities, appalled her. And as for him, he seemed distracted — fighting against himself, and determined to destroy his own sombre imaginings and fears.

"There is nothing so despicable as an intermeddler and busybody," he said, with a sudden vehemence of angry self-contempt. "And he is almost certainly misinformed—necessarily so—he is an outsider. And he almost invariably works mischief. How is it possible that I should know more about

Hitrovo than Amélie does—she who has been studying him closely all this time? The idea of my taking information about Hitrovo to *her!* And the information would be wrong; it would be founded on a personal misapprehension of my own; it would be the result of misunderstanding, of false judgment. Why should he not ask about the extent of her fortune? It is but natural he should want to know. And why should I take it for granted that he would squander the money on the Turf? Ah, I see you understand how these fears of mine arise. I know why you are silent. You are saying to yourself that I am jealous; that I hate him for taking her away from association with me; that I attribute motives that are ungenerous; that I am prophesying evil because I feel injured. Well, perhaps it is so—I hope it is so—"

He was standing opposite her—his earnest eyes and questioning face bent down upon her. Somehow, with a kind of instinct, she

reached up her hand to his hand, and took it, and pressed it for a moment: it was a trivial little action more significant than any words.

"No," she said, "that is not to be thought of. Not any one could think *that*. The affection you have shown towards her—so constant—so unselfish—I have never seen the like of. And now you are thinking of nothing but her. It is her welfare—her happiness—always. But, my dear friend, how can I answer you? You are hoping for the best: perhaps the best may come. Will you tell me this?—did he speak, apart from these mere money-matters, as if he really cared for her?"

"He spoke as if his sole concern was the amount of her fortune—and what he was going to do with it!" Wolfenberg exclaimed, with an involuntary return to that tone of indignation; but the next moment he had become dreadfully confused, and humble, and apologetic. "Naturally, naturally," he said.

"Men don't talk of sacred and secret things in a corner of a smoking-room. Of course he cares for her, or why should he wish to marry her? He could marry well elsewhere; he has high connections; he could probably marry a bigger fortune than hers, if that were all he was seeking. No, no; why should we suppose anything of the kind? In a smoking-room—talking to one who was almost a stranger to him—of course he spoke merely of ordinary and practical things. He knew that I was more or less acquainted with their affairs; and he wanted information—what could be more reasonable? He was not going to talk about love-passages—to wear his heart on his sleeve—in a ship's smoking-room! And when he spoke of the cost of living in Vienna, and the expense of giving entertainments, and keeping a few race-horses, why, that was only telling me something in return for what I had told him. Yes, I see I must have exaggerated it all to my own mind," he went on, with a kind

of pathetic insistence. "I must have jumped to unwarranted conclusions, merely because he was so outspoken and straightforward. And then, if I were to go and alarm Mrs. Dumaresq unnecessarily, would not that be a monstrous piece of stupidity? As I say, I am foolishly nervous and apprehensive about Amélie and anything that might affect her; and I must exercise a little self-control; I must bring some common-sense to bear; I must wait for to-morrow's clear daylight to dispel all these black dreams."

"That at least can do no harm," she said as she rose—and indeed it was time for all of us to get away below, to seek out our several berths.

As the two women paused for a second at the door of Peggy's cabin, there were but few words spoken between them.

"Well, Missis, what do you think of that?"

"I know one thing, Peggy," said her friend, sadly enough. "In spite of all his brave

optimism, there is a sick heart on board this ship this night."

Next morning we were amongst the most southerly of the shining Cyclades. A glance out of the port-hole told us we were nearing certain ruddy islands of a curious burnt and arid aspect: lofty cliffs and peaks of slag and tufa, with here and there shelves and crests of marble and here and there masses of tumbled cinders. Not a blade of vegetation anywhere visible; while the only symptom of human life or occupation was a solitary fishing-boat, the orange-gold hull and sails of which, catching the early sunlight, sent glaring reflections down on the glassy blue mirror of the sea. Then the gradual lessening of the *Orotania's* speed was of itself a sufficient summons: we were in a manner called on deck, to see what was abroad.

We discovered that we were quietly stealing into the Gulf of Santorin—a circular, or

almost circular, basin, formed by the enclosing crescent of Thera and the shorter coast line of Therasia. But the strange thing to think of was that we were now steaming slowly across the crater of a volcano—a volcano not at all extinct, but capable, in its livelier moods, of throwing up an island or two from its unknown ocean depths. At the present moment there was little sign of disturbance either by water or land; the ruddy cliffs were still and silent; the azure plain around us showed hardly a ripple.

It was a striking scene, and beautiful in its way, but in no wise terrific or awe-inspiring; and when our friends began to appear, in little detached groups, a general air of animation and cheerfulness prevailed. Amélie Dumaresq, in especial, seemed to be very merry and light-hearted on this pleasant morning; she had put her arm round her mother's waist; she was laughing and talking and looking up to Paul Hitrovo: Wolfenberg—more thoughtful of face—was also with them.

"Why doesn't the kettle boil?" we could hear her say, as she was regarding the still blue circumference of sea. "Or has the water put out the fires?"

There were other two women separated from that little knot of companions by but a few yards.

"Missis," said Peggy, in an undertone, "have you been considering what you were told last evening?"

"I lay awake a good part of the night," was the simple answer.

"And don't you think," continued Peggy, with significant eyes, "that there are certain people not very far away from us who are just over a volcano in more senses than one?"

"Poor Wolfenberg!" said her friend, absently: she did not seem to heed about the others.

CHAPTER III.

UNDER-CURRENTS.

AND so once again we were on the wide waste of waters, yet not altogether out of sight of land, for in the north a few rocky islands, of a faint rose-grey, were visible, while in the south a pale film along the horizon spoke of the distant coast-line of Crete. But the fact is that we had for long grown so accustomed to the ever-constant features of that outer world—the cloudless skies, the spacious circle of blue-black, silver-flashing waves, and the blaze of white light away towards the sun—that it was only by accident one's attention strayed beyond the rail of the ship; in this floating home of ours there were sufficient interests to occupy us; and more especially at

this moment were these interests become of serious, not to say tragic, import.

For to Wolfenberg the long hours of the night had brought no reassurance. As soon as our Orotanians had settled down to their ordinary duties or amusements, he took the first convenient opportunity of seeking out the small woman whose tact, and shrewdness, and unfailing sympathy and kindliness he had learned to understand. And we could see by something in his face that he had no good news to report.

"Perhaps you think I was exaggerating when I spoke to you last evening," he said to her. "But it isn't so. There was even some concealment: I thought you might be induced to take a hopeful view. And now you ought to know the truth; for something terrible may be looming ahead—that even yet might be averted; and it is your experience, and judgment, and knowledge of a woman's nature that a man finds need of in such a crisis.'

Her eyes were fixed on him ; and as plainly as possible they said: 'Well, tell me the story. But it is about you—it is about you yourself—that I am really concerned.'

"I have been thinking it over during the night," he went on. "And the truth is I did not half describe to you the coolness with which Hitrovo talked. He quite seemed to take it for granted that it was to be made well worth his while to marry. And his ideas about the extent of Amélie's fortune were absolutely preposterous. No doubt the Dumaresqs are very well off; and Amélie is an only child ; but he appeared to regard her as a great heiress ; and his schemes about the administration of her property, when it came under his control, were grand indeed. Did I tell you about the race-horses? I know little about race-horses myself; but I should imagine that keeping up such an establishment as he spoke of would be a most expensive affair, to say nothing of the gambling and betting.

The fact is, in estimating Amélie's probable fortune, he has been led astray by her diamonds. I can see that. He assumes that her money will be in proportion to her jewellery; and there he is entirely mistaken; for the bulk of those diamonds came to her as a special legacy from an aunt who died some years ago——"

"It is very extraordinary that a girl should carry about with her £4,000 or £5,000 worth of diamonds," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, in a casual way.

"They are a plaything for her," said he, briefly—for when would he allow that Amélie Dumaresq was acting with any lack of discretion? "And they are safe enough while we are at sea; and then again, when we get into port, she hands them over to the Purser and his strong-box. But you can easily understand how Hitrovo, seeing such a quantity of jewellery in the possession of a young unmarried girl, would naturally imagine that her

property was in proportion: hence the talk about race-horses—about the fine house in Vienna—and balls, and musical evenings, and private theatricals. If he is selling himself," added Wolfenberg, with unusual bitterness—"as he almost leaves you to infer—he is demanding a large price!"

Mrs. Threepenny-bit was silent and thoughtful for a moment or two.

"Young men sometimes talk with affected cynicism in such cases," she said. "But there are means by which you could find out whether he was making honest confession or not. For instance, you could tell him how mistaken he was about the amount of Amélie's fortune. You would be justified in doing so; that would not be the interference of a busybody—which you seem to dread; for he himself has applied to you for information. That is one point. Another is, you can hint pretty plainly to him that her money will be strictly tied up and settled upon herself. Then hear what he has to say."

A quick flush sprang to his face; and he seemed to shrink back from that proposal, almost in alarm.

"Oh, I could not do that!" he said, hurriedly. "Why—why—that would look as if I wanted the engagement broken off!—whereas, it is quite the other way: there is nothing I would not do to have the marriage come about happily, when I see how her whole life seems bound up in it. No, no; no, no; I am all anxiety that everything should go on well, and safely, and happily; and surely it is wiser to have a little confidence—surely one ought to be on the sanguine side—to hope for the best—"

It was clear that this man knew not what to think—that his mind was racked and torn asunder by the conflict between his desperate misgivings and his dogged optimism.

"Would it not be more reasonable," he continued, "to take up your other conjecture, so that I could go to him and say—'Come,

now, admit that there was a good deal of affectation in your manner of speaking last night. You are not really going to marry in order to have plenty of money to squander in Vienna. You cannot be quite so calmly indifferent to Amélie herself—to her personal grace and charm, her striking and attractive individuality, her intellectual gifts. You don't honestly consider that you are selling yourself for a mess of potage. That is all *blague*—or rather the talk of the young man of the present day, who above all things detests and dreads being thought sentimental.' Wouldn't that be better?—wouldn't that be the more generous interpretation?—and mightn't it lead him to speak in a less openly cynical fashion?"

"Perhaps," she said, evasively.

"And you may be sure of this," he went on, "that he does not talk in that way to Amélie. She must see and know the other side. Look at her over there now: did you ever behold such a perfect embodiment of high

spirits and radiant happiness? What is she after now?"

"Worrying people into giving promises for to-morrow night's concert," answered Mrs. Threepenny-bit, coldly. Indeed, she had of late shown herself somewhat impervious to Amélie Dumaresq's many fascinations—though ordinarily she was not hard of heart towards young women.

"I shall hope to see her as careless and merry as that always," said he, with a certain wistfulness. And then he came back to this subject that had caused him so much of perplexity and pain.

"There is one thing I must ask you," he said. "Supposing that you, or I, or anybody were to be personally convinced that Hitrovo was marrying Amélie wholly from mercenary motives, then would you consider it a point of honour that she should be told? Or don't you think, if you saw how all her hopes were centred upon this union, that you would rather

be silent, and trust to everything coming right, and try to work to that end? You see, you might be altogether mistaken in your suspicions. It is easy to misjudge people: it is difficult to get at motives. But, above all, if you saw that her chances of happiness in life were irrevocably pledged, would you not rather rely upon things coming out right somehow, instead of going to her with the cruel truth? Remember what she is——"

"Yes, I know what you mean," responded his friend. "And I remember what you said last night about her passionate pride—that it would kill her if she were to discover that she had been deceived by an adventurer, that she had been sought after merely for her money. Well, I am not so sure that such a discovery would kill her. I think her pride would work another way. It would make her furious; it would make her a good deal more anxious to kill him—that is, if she found out in time. And supposing he is the despicable creature you suggest——"

"Oh, but I did not suggest that!" he said, anxiously—and one almost seemed to fancy that his face grew a trifle pale. "No; I say it is impossible he can be blind to what Amélie is in herself; it is impossible he can be thinking only of her money. And your surmise is so much more reasonable—that he may be merely talking for effect. He would not confess it if it were really true!—he would conceal it——"

"Anyhow," said she, "let us imagine for a moment that it is really true. And if Amélie were to make the discovery in time—before marriage, I mean—would not the very pride you speak of enable her to throw him off without an apparent pang? It isn't as if she would be left desolate, and objectless, and friendless. Could she not resume that relationship with you that she used to be so enthusiastic about?—and take up her painting?—and become a great artist?—and do all the fine things she was set upon?"

He appeared for a moment bewildered.

"Resume all that?" he said, with the strangest look in his eyes. Then he seemed to put away from him that possibility as something too hopeless, as something for ever done with. "No, no; it cannot be. The current of her life has set in another direction; and it cannot be stemmed or diverted now, without a catastrophe too frightful to contemplate. No, no; we have to make the best; we have to hope for the best——"

And at this very moment, when he was driven nigh to distraction by anxiety on her account, Amélie herself came over to us, gay, audacious, scornfully-mocking, and light-hearted as a linnet. She certainly looked charming. The slight make-up she was in the habit of adding to her complexion for evening wear was now absent; there was a youthful freshness in the pale olive hue of her cheek; her lips were healthily red without any salve at all; and a perfectly reckless and

childish merriment laughed in the dark, soft, audacious eyes.

"Why, you are the most persistently idle people!" she exclaimed. "I can bear down anybody's opposition except yours; you are too dreadfully stubborn. Why won't you help us? We have all sorts of offers that we want to refuse; and yet you won't enable us; you are mute, and obstinate, and clannish, and unsocial. And, mind you, I have heard—oh, yes, I have heard of ongoings elsewhere—plantation choruses—banjoes—and pretty late hours, too—or early, whichever you like to call them; but here you are all as mum as mice. Why, even that dear creature, Sappho, has come down from her lofty heights to assist us—and this time it is not a recitation merely—but a song: isn't it good of her?"

"To sing for you?" Lady Cameron interposed. "It is impossible! She told me she was struggling day and night with a Requiem for the ocean-grave of Phaon; and that she

could get no peace, it was so difficult. You see, she wants to bring in something pointing to the murderer—the supposed murderer; and that may not be so easy. She was in great gloom about it: it is impossible she can have undertaken to sing!"

"She is going to sing nevertheless," said the young lady, confidently. "And she has given us the name of her song. She means to appeal to popular sentiment—she is resolved to captivate the crowd with simple and honest pathos—she is going to sing 'When other lips.'"

No one was inhuman enough to laugh; nay, a perfect and subdued gravity was maintained by every pair of eyes. But how could we help figuring in imagination the rather dowdy figure, and the dishevelled sandy hair, and the wail of hopeless passion telling of Sappho's own tragic past? And how could we help recalling young Alec Burke, who was erewhile in the Foreign Office, but whom the Foreign

Office will see no more? *Cha till, cha till, cha till e tuille!* Maddened by merciless persecution, he took a consulship and fled to the Gold Coast: he knew she dared not follow him thither—or, at least, he would have long notice of her coming, and would have time to escape. Then he was heard of at Costa Rica —at San Salvador—at Bogota—at Nicaragua. Poor Alec!—a wanderer on the face of the earth—looking back towards England from time to time, but always with a shuddering fear. *An cogadh na sith cha till e tuille!*

During the better part of this day the ship was as full of strange noises as was Caliban's island—'Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not'—in preparation for the following night. And as we happened to be in the neighbourhood, we thought we might as well look in and see how Ferdinand and Miranda were getting on, in the company of the arch-magician weaving his spells. Yes, we found all three in the fore-saloon; our

entrance did not seem to make any difference; the artist proceeded with his work, talking the while; and if he had two more auditors, what then? He did not seem to heed.

And yet no one could have understood Wolfenberg's present mood and attitude—his apparent equanimity—who had not observed the rare combination of faculties that his features expressed: the imagination and pensive wistfulness of his forehead and eyes along with the determined will and strength of the lower part of his face. No doubt he had made an appointment with these young folks; and here he was keeping it; and he was resolutely and definitely thrusting away from him his own pressing anxieties in order to entertain his sitter and hold her interested. His talk was chiefly a kind of monologue—sometimes whimsical, sometimes serious—that was interrupted now and again when he stepped back to judge of the progress of his work.

"I was just saying to these young people,"

he remarked to Mrs. Threepenny-bit, as she took a seat not far from him, "that the confidence of youth, the splendid audacity of youth, was a very fine kind of thing, but that occasionally it became almost shocking—especially in the way of rash statements. Take the young man who was in love with the lass of Richmond Hill. His assertion—'I'd crowns resign to call her mine'—was much too absolute and unqualified. If he had said 'I *think*, in certain circumstances, I might perhaps resign a crown or several crowns in order to call her mine,' that would have been more prudent. I am afraid, if he had been taken at his word, and if he had had the crown or crowns to resign, he might have been tempted to think twice——"

"It was only a figure of speech!" young Verrinder said, naturally defending his kith and kind.

"Yes," said Wolfenberg—still working away at the splendid throat and the dark hair

under the mysterious veil. "Yes, a figure of speech. In fact, hyperbole. And hyperbole is the natural language of a young man, if only he would talk naturally. But he is afraid. He prefers sheltering himself behind an affectation of indifference—or, worse still, cynicism. Now cynicism is the most useless kind of a thing in the whole wide world. Cynicism never does anything. 'Ice makes no conflagration.' Fanaticism may work miracles; cynicism produces nothing. And the reason why the human race gives so eager a welcome to any new prophet, or new faith, or new enthusiasm, is that through thousands and thousands of years men and women have grown so tired and disappointed with the commonplace routine of life, with its narrow interests, its monotonous experiences, its miserable perishing into nothingness, that when any one puts something higher and nobler before them, and calls on them to attain to it, then hope stirs in them again, their

imagination is fired, another millennium appears in the future. The millennium never comes; but they have the joy of striving forward towards it; and I suppose something is added to human consciousness by each wave of human faith. And if you wish to make your mark on your own time and age—But perhaps, Mr. Julian, the rearing of pheasants is what you're looking forward to?" he said, with a laugh, as he turned aside to pick up his penknife.

"And why not the rearing of pheasants?" said the Baby (blushing furiously). "We can't all be prophets?—you wouldn't have a whole nation of prophets?"

"Quite right—I quite agree with you," he answered her, good-naturedly — indeed, he seemed rather pleased by this spirited little bit of protest. "I was only going to say that if you wish to impress yourself on your own time you must teach people that there is something finer, and more wonderful, and more desirable

than the ordinary everyday existence they see around them; and you may do that if you have the heart and brain of a poet, or a painter, or a musician, for each has his own revelation to make. But—if you will allow me to have my sermon out—" he continued, looking over in a very kindly fashion towards this young lady, "there is another way, in a smaller sphere. We cannot all be authors and artists and musicians, any more than we could have the country filled with prophets and priests. But I will take a single human being, who is none of these things, but who has certain qualities of honour, and modesty, and unselfishness, and sweetness, and gentleness; and if, through the constant exercise of all these gifts and graces she can show to those around her what it is to possess a beautiful human soul, do you think she has exercised no influence on her day and generation? Surely she has; and perhaps with wider results than she knows."

It was Julian Verrinder's face that burned now—with pride and gratitude. The meaning of these few words was clear enough; and they were spoken with such a simplicity and sincerity that (as Mrs. Threepenny-bit said thereafter, with tears in her eyes) they sounded to her like a benediction.

But Wolfenberg was in a very different frame of mind that evening—all this placid and kindly serenity gone from him, and himself become a prey to the most torturing of self-questionings and dark conjectures. As he did not keep the usual rendezvous after dinner, one of us was by and by despatched to find him, and eventually he was discovered right away forward, quite by himself, pacing up and down the moonlit deck, his hands clasped behind him, the fingers clenched.

"No, no," he said, in answer to a suggestion that he might come away aft to our accustomed retreat; "why should I inflict my troubles upon you and your companions? You are

away on a voyage of amusement and rest; why should you have other people's cares thrust on you?"

He hesitated for a moment: it was evident that all the same he wanted to speak—that he had something to communicate. Then he said, almost hurriedly—

"I am afraid I have wrought mischief—and irreparable mischief—and I don't know what to think of it yet. And it was none of my seeking either. I did not wish to interfere; I wanted rather to shut my eyes a little, and trust that everything would go on well. But he came to me—Hitrovo came to me—and re-opened that subject—pressing for information, and yet with a carelessness that seemed to say 'Oh, don't imagine I am a fortune-hunter; I am not a fortune-hunter at all; only, before I marry, I must know that it is going to be worth my while.' And I confess I grew indignant. I am afraid I lost my temper. Why, the shamelessness of it all

seemed an insult—to Amélie. It is quite true that nearly everybody had gone below to get ready for dinner, and there were few people on deck; but the Captain had just come out of his cabin, and he was talking to Lady Cameron—I believe they could have overheard Hitrovo, if they had chosen to listen. Or perhaps I was nervously anxious that he should not be overheard; at all events, I had to ask him to come aside; and he appeared to take the whole situation so coolly —Well, I'm afraid I lost my temper, and said things I ought not to have said. I said that if this mercenary talk of his was all a pretence, it was a poor kind of affectation. Then I told him plainly that he seemed entirely to over-estimate the amount of Amélie's fortune; and not only so, but that it was perfectly certain her uncle, the chief trustee, would take care it was kept entirely within her own control. There I was wrong. I had no right to say that. When he asked

me to give him some idea as to what property there would be, perhaps I was entitled to tell him that it would certainly be a great deal smaller than he seemed to expect; for that I knew; that was within my own knowledge. But I had no right to speak of the disposal of her fortune—"

"Surely you said nothing that was not perfectly obvious to anybody possessed of common-sense! He must have known that the money would be settled on herself! Well, how did he take the information—if it was information?"

"Oh, he hum'd and ha'd—and twisted a deck-chair about—rather like a spoilt child. And then he said a few words—coolly and carelessly—as if the whole affair were of very little moment to him; and then he went away. I cannot make him out at all."

"But don't you think that plain speaking of yours may have wrought some good—may have made him a little bit ashamed?"

"I should not have done it—I should not have done it," he said, almost to himself—and his face seemed careworn in this wan light. "The risks are too serious. The consequences of a false step now—of mistaken interference—might be too dreadful to think of. What I know is," he continued, presently, "that the little I have made by my painting is not much of a fortune, but if it were ten times as great, I would gladly take it to him, every cent, and say, 'Let this go towards your fine entertainments in Vienna; but don't touch Amélie's money; and don't let her think that money had anything to do with her marriage.'"

"It isn't the first time a woman has thrown over a good friend for a bad husband."

"You must not think of such a thing!" he exclaimed, in great agitation. "There cannot be anything of the kind in this case—not at all! I tell you I exaggerate trifles where she is concerned; you must not mind half what I say; rather look at her—look

at her splendid courage and nerve—do you think she is not capable of seeing clearly enough? Oh, you will find that everything will go right!" he continued, with a sort of doggedness. "Why, if you only think of it that very frankness of his, though it may startle you at the time, is a good deal wholesomer than concealment. If he were marrying merely for money, he would conceal it—of course he would! And do you think Amélie does not know and understand what he is?—and she has faith in him, or she would not entrust her life to him."

He had forced himself into something of cheerfulness; the haunted look had in a measure left his face; and in the end he was persuaded to come aft to those friends who were awaiting him. But the two women scrupulously forbore from making any reference to Amélie Dumaresq; and he also maintained silence. The talk was about quite indifferent matters; sometimes there was a

promenading of the deck, with a glance outward on the waves lapping in the moonlight; and sometimes there was a pause at the top of the companion-way, to listen to the rehearsal going on in the saloon.

That night a puff of wind came blowing down from the Adriatic, and the *Orotania* rolled a good bit; nothing to speak of, and yet almost a novel experience. Next morning, again, brought us something still more unexpected. A dark cloud crept stealthily into the brilliancy of the day; it increased in gloom; there were a few splinterings of pink flame; and then—the wonder of it!—actually rain! Yes, rain that came down in silver-grey sheets, hammering on the awnings, and hissing and seething on the decks; the strangest sound it was; it seemed to bring back far other times and places. And then it gradually ceased; the day widened and cleared; and around us once more we had the familiar features as of old—a sky of pale

ethereal purple, a sea of blue almost aggressive in its strength, with diamond-gleams of sunlight from every crest and angle of the restless waves. Very lonely these waters seemed to be—yet not uncheerful.

During the afternoon we discovered that Mrs. Dumaresq had grown somewhat concerned about the part her daughter might possibly take in the proceedings of the evening.

"Has she told you?" the mother asked covertly of Mrs. Threepenny-bit. "She is so headstrong and daring; you never can guess what she is going to do; and indeed if it is something bizarre—something calculated to shock people, she likes that all the better—"

"But you don't expect her to unfurl the Russian flag or do anything of that kind?" the other said, smiling. "We are no longer in a Russian port. No, no, Mrs. Dumaresq, do not be afraid; Amélie says she has per-

formed her share in beating up recruits; she means to remain with us among the audience; she has no mischief in her mind, you may depend on it."

"But she does things so unexpectedly," the mother rejoined, with doubt lingering in her voice. "And she is so absolutely defiant of public opinion. She is going to sit with us at our usual table?"

"So she says. It seems the chief difficulty has been that there were really too many volunteers. Apparently shyness has worn off. All kinds of undiscovered musicians have been coming forward to get a place in the programme. And I doubt whether Amélie will be called upon to do anything at all."

"I am glad of that—I am glad of that!" she murmured, with a sigh of relief. "It is so dreadful to have a young girl talked about—and Amélie is so ungovernable."

A little later on, as certain of us were standing talking together, Amélie Dumaresq

came along, and said in her frank, impetuous way—

"I wish one of you would do me a favour."

"Yes?"

"That is a very pretty custom they have at some of the tables of asking a friend from another table to dine with them. We never have any visitors at our table—except at lunch-time. Now will you ask Mr. Hitrovo to dine with us to-night? Mamma is so timid about upsetting arrangements; but how can there be any difficulty?"

Well, there was no difficulty; for we got the Baby to go and sit next Miss Penguin; and as Julian Verrinder had his place at that table, she was very well content; while the young Russian came and took her vacant seat. We noticed nothing particular about his manner; in truth he was not in the habit of asserting himself much in any way. For one thing he certainly paid no special attention to the young lady to whom we understood he

was engaged; he talked mostly, and in an indolent kind of fashion, to Mrs. Threepenny-bit—about driving and what not. But at a certain point during the dinner, Amélie, with her fingers on the stem of her wine-glass, said—

"Ernest, don't you think we ought to wish our guest '*bon voyage*'?"

Wolfenberg looked startled.

"Oh, don't you know?" she continued, lightly. "He thinks it very probable he may have news to-morrow at Malta that may call him away from the ship—there is a line of steamers from Malta to Marseilles—and that is how he thinks of going. Well, if it must be, it must."

She turned to Hitrovo, and regarded him with smiling eyes.

"*Au revoir*, then, if it must be—and *bon voyage!*"—and therewith she raised her glass, and sipped a little of the wine, still with her eyes fixed pleasantly on his.

But Wolfenberg sate silent and quite pale,

not daring to speak. He even forgot the formal raising of his glass. He seemed at once astounded and dismayed—and yet fearful of betraying himself by word or sign.

CHAPTER IV.

"DA SVIDANIA!"

EARLY morning; and a glance through one of the ports reveals an old familiar picture—the great yellow bulk of Fort St. Elmo towering high into the blue. Then on deck; and we find ourselves slowly steaming into Malta harbour. Throughout one small circle of our shipmates it is to be suspected that some little excitement prevails—subdued and reticent: it is felt that this may be a day of change and circumstance for more than one of our companions.

And hardly has the roar of anchor and anchor-chain died away when the *Orotania* mail-bag arrives; and instantly a nebulous crowd, good-humoured, talkative, obliging, has

clustered round the third officer, who generally presides at the distribution. But Lady Cameron is not among these idly-gossiping folk. What interest has she in any correspondence? She is standing by the rail, quite alone; while her eyes are intently scanning the various gaily-coloured craft that are now making swiftly out from the mole, across the clear-shining water. For now the young grass-widow is about to be transformed into a lawful wife; she will take her proper place on board; perhaps she is even looking forward to giving herself airs when Cameron of Inverfask comes among us. As for Inverfask, there are no airs about *him;* but it is the business of a wife to magnify her husband's exploits and commanding qualities.

Meanwhile, as this deciphering and calling out of name after name was going on, one ventured to steal a look at the Baby. She had not joined that small crowd; she was modestly remaining a little way apart; yet it was easy to see that she was listening with all her ears.

"Do you expect any letters?" Mrs. Three-penny-bit said to her, in her kindly fashion.

"Oh, no," the Juno-eyed damsel made answer, hurriedly—and self-conscious colour sprang to her face. "I don't expect any letter—no—not for myself." And then in her embarrassment she seemed to consider it necessary to apologise for her being there. "But—but there might be one for my sister, you know."

Suddenly those large, gentle, shy eyes looked startled.

"Mr. Julian Verrinder!" the third officer had sung out.

Then we discovered that Julian Verrinder was right in the middle of that loosely-scattered assemblage.

"Oh, here's another for you, Mr. Verrinder," the third officer went on. "And still another."

The Baby's face was a study—as far as one dared to observe. The intense listening—the absorbed suspense—had fled; relief, gladness,

gratitude shone there, despite all her efforts to maintain an outward show of impassivity; and presently we saw her quietly withdraw from the outskirts of the crowd and wander along to the wheel-box, which was as much as to say to any one concerned: 'When you have read those letters, you will find me here. And if you want me to look at them, could not I smuggle them into my pocket and carry them downstairs to my cabin?' As a matter of fact, Julian Verrinder, after a discreet second or two, did sneak off in the direction of that quiet corner. On his way he affected to show a profound interest in the brightly-painted boats that were now swarming along the vessel's side.

"Lady Cameron!" the third officer called out.

Then he looked round: there was no Lady Cameron.

"I will take it to her!" said the Major, delighted to have the chance of doing her

this service; and away he went with the letter.

Almost immediately thereafter Peggy came over to us—vexation and disappointment only too visible in her face.

"Isn't it provoking!" she exclaimed. "This is from Ewen. He is detained in Rangoon another fortnight—perhaps three weeks. Did you ever know anything more vexatious? Missis, I want to swear. How much will you allow me? Or shall I get the Major to do it for me?"

"The Major covers quite enough ground on his own account," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, severely.

"And I shall have to go by myself all the way home to Inverfask!" continued our injured Peggy. Then sudden revolt appeared. "No, I will not, then! I will remain in London. I am coming to you, if you will have me; and I think we will just about make things hum! It's too bad! Why, I looked

forward to his taking us ashore both here and at Gibraltar, and getting us all kinds of privileges——." Then she quite altered her tone and grew grave. "Missis," said she in an undertone, "I had forgotten about Wolfenberg. You know—the invitation. And I had hoped he would go right on with us to Inverfask. What am I to do?"

"You can easily explain to him," said her friend. "And if Wolfenberg does not go to Inverfask till later on, then I must take care that we see as much as possible of him while he remains in London. Ship-acquaintances are easily allowed to drift; but there are some that are too valuable; and besides there may be circumstances that call upon you——" She did not complete the sentence; for at this point the Major returned with another letter —which also was from Ewen Cameron for his wife.

But the strangest circumstance connected with this distribution of the mail was that

Paul Hitrovo, whose leaving the ship, or not leaving the ship, was understood to depend on the news he should receive at Malta, did not put in an appearance until the last of the letters and newspapers had been delivered. It was then that he chanced to come along, accompanied by Mrs. Dumaresq and her daughter; and all three of them seemed to be in a highly cheerful mood. Perhaps he had heard through some other source that his departure had been rendered unnecessary?

"Just think of this man," cried Amélie, coming forward to us in her gay fashion, "who has never heard of his great namesake—the Chevalier Paul—who was born in the roadstead of Marseilles—and fought his way to be vice-admiral and all sorts of things. Why, it was in this very place that his adventures began: don't you know the ballad?—

'A Malte, sur un brigantin,
Il met son sac un beau matin
Et rondement fait son chemin,
A l'abordage.

Le capitaine ayant péri,
Paul est nommé chef tout d'un cri
Par l'équipage.
A-t-on jamais vu plus charmant
Avancement ?
Écoutez son histoire,
Mes vieux, elle est à notre gloire !
Mes vieux, elle est à notre gloire !'"

She waved her arm triumphantly—her eyes laughing the while.

"Amélie," said the ever-anxious mother, in an undertone, "not so loud!"

And it was at this moment, when Hitrovo happened to have turned aside to speak to some one, that Wolfenberg drew near. He had been amongst those people who were surrounding the third officer; or at least he had been looking on. And now, as he approached Amélie Dumaresq, there was something curiously furtive, timid, apprehensive in his expression.

"Amélie," he said, with a kind of nervous watching of her face, "you told me last night that Mr. Hitrovo might have to leave for

Marseilles to-day—if he got certain news, that is. Well, I suppose that is all abandoned now; for there was no letter for him; he cannot have got any news——"

"Oh, but he was not expecting any letter!" she said, interrupting him blithely. "Not at all. He may telegraph when we get ashore; but in any case he thinks it will be necessary for him to leave the ship here, and take the first steamer for Marseilles——"

"He is really going?" said Wolfenberg, quickly.

"Oh, yes," she made answer, in the same light-hearted fashion. "But it will be a race between us. He ought to reach England just about as soon as we shall, or even sooner——"

"He is coming on to England at once, then?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" she said. "He does not expect there will be much to detain him; and overland travelling is so expeditious; I should not be at all surprised if he won in the

neck-and-neck race to London. By the way, we shall have him again to dinner to-night; at least, I hope so—we shall see as soon as we land; and in that case, Ernest, if you want to make a pretty little speech about our departing guest— ?"

He did not respond to that suggestion; but he seemed greatly relieved.

"Oh, he is coming on to London at once?" he repeated.

"Ernest," said she, laughing, "is it gloves or money you are after? Is it a bet? Very well. I will bet you ten pairs of gloves, twenty pairs, thirty pairs, if you like, that when we arrive at Tilbury, Monsieur Paul d'Hitrovo will be standing on the pier there to receive us. That is my offer. I am not greedy. I do not wish for odds. And yet as I know I am going to win, the odds are of importance, are they not? What do you say? It is a long journey—Marseilles—Vienna—Paris—London—"

"Oh, that is the arrangement, then, that he is to meet you at Tilbury?" he said, with something of a brighter look.

"If he gets to England in time, of course," she put in.

"Naturally, naturally. It will be quite pleasant to have some one waiting to welcome you."

"But I am not to have the gloves!" she exclaimed, petulantly.

"When we all get to London together, Amélie," said he, in his grave and gentle way, "you shall have gloves, and gloves, and gloves—or anything else that you wish. But you must not expect me to back the ship in the great match of *Orotania* v. Hitrovo—because I should not wish to win."

She bestowed a glance of gratitude upon him.

"That is like you, Ernest. You always have something kind to say—when one least deserves it."

So far the day had opened well. The tenour of the communications that Julian Verrinder had received from his relations in England must have been wholly satisfactory; the shy, happy, self-conscious face of the Baby was sufficient evidence; while Wolfenberg—in a much more serious matter—seemed to have been half-convinced by Amélie Dumaresq's audacious confidence that there was not much occasion for alarm as regarded Hitrovo's sudden departure. Perhaps it was this fortunate state of affairs that sent Mrs. Threepenny-bit away ashore in very good spirits; at all events as soon as we had taken our places in the stern of the rowing-boat, she said, with an air of great satisfaction——

"Do you know, Peggy, I never land at Malta, I never come into this bay, and go up the winding streets yonder without the most curious sensation that I have got home again. I cannot understand it at all. Perhaps it is the English money in the shops—perhaps it is

the English flag over the Governor's Palace——perhaps it is the English sentry outside his wooden box: anyhow I have the strangest feeling that I am amongst my own people, and safe, and at home——"

"You cannot say it is a very English-looking place," observed Peggy, regarding the blue-green water, the brilliant boats, the yellow quays, the terraced houses built on the face of the steep cliffs, the arid walls, with here and there a scrap of cactus or cypress, and, high above all, the great forts, massive and golden, against the deep azure of a cloudless sky.

"And I declare I just love Tommy Atkins," continued the smaller woman, in her enthusiasm of the moment, "when I meet the impudent wretch come swaggering along with his cap cocked on one side and his cane in his hand. Then the sentries up at the bastions—they are a little different because of their pith helmet—and yet it is so comforting to know

that they are English—or Scotch, or Irish, as it may be; and you are horribly tempted to go and say, 'Look here, my lad, can't I take a message to Mary Ann, or Susan, or Jane? I should like to tell her that I've seen you—and that you're doing your small part in keeping the British Empire together?' Peggy, what's the punishment for talking to a sentry?"

"Decapitation," says Peggy, promptly.

"Oh, what do you know about anything!" her friend retorts, with impatience. "A pretty officer's wife you are—never to have landed at Malta! ——"

"And I expected to land at Malta in a very different way," says Peggy, with a proud and injured look. "I made sure that Ewen would take us about. And at Gibraltar, too. Why, he coolly writes and says that the Black Watch, the 42nd Highlanders, are stationed at Gibraltar just now, and I am to call on So-and-so, and we are to be shown the galleries, and

I don't know what else. But I shan't! I will not go ashore at Gibraltar—not for one single quarter of an hour."

"Peggy, none of your little tempers!" her companion said, reprovingly. "Do you suppose Colonel Cameron is remaining in Rangoon of his own free-will? And of course you must go ashore at Gib., for it is even more extraordinary than Malta, in the sense of home it produces. Why, you seem to be conscious all the time that you are just round the corner from England—although about five days' sailing intervenes. Not land at Gib.?" —But here we were at the worn yellow steps of the quay, so the discussion ceased.

Now during the long and blazing and sweltering hours we were compelled to remain ashore (for the *Orotania* was coaling) we were continually running against one or other of our shipmates—mostly in the Strada Reale, where the women folk were industriously idle in purchasing lace, and silver, and trinkets

for friends at home. In this manner we encountered all the current gossip—how the Dumaresqs had driven away out to the Catacombs—how the Major was going to give a luncheon-party at the Union Club—and the like; but the oddest thing was that everybody seemed already to have become aware of Hitrovo's approaching departure, while many and contradictory were the reasons assigned for that unexpected step. The Major's solution of the problem was brief and to the point.

"Plain as a pikestaff!" he said to Lady Cameron, when we chanced to meet him. "Vienna? Bosh! Who wants to land at Marseilles in order to get to Vienna? If he had wanted to go to Vienna, he would have left the ship at Constantinople. But Marseilles—I know what Marseilles means—Marseilles—Nice—Monte Carlo: that's the line he'll take. Our sixpenny points in the afternoon were not good enough for him—though

he would watch the cards with the eye of a gambler——"

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense, Major!" Lady Cameron protested. "You are all prejudiced against him—I mean, all you gentlemen—because of his good looks. There's nothing of the gambler in his appearance. And if he refused to join in your game, isn't that all the more to his credit?"

"You mark my words," insisted the Major. "I know the line of travel he'll take: a bee-line: straight for *rouge-et-noir*. Sixpenny whist is not good enough; we must have the grand game; therefore Marseilles—Nice—Monte Carlo. Plain as a pikestaff!"

"Now, Major, answer me this," said Lady Cameron, with the greatest good-humour. "Have you seen him touch a single card all through this voyage?"

"No, I have not—I should have thought none the worse of him if he had——"

"Have you seen him gamble to the extent of a single franc?" she said.

"No, I have not——"

"And don't you perceive," she went on, relentlessly, "that what you say against him can only be the wildest surmise? It is the kind of story that springs up on board ship—without any foundation whatever. You have absolutely nothing to bring against him: so you must needs suspect him of being a gambler! Is it fair?"

"Marseilles—Nice—Monte Carlo," said the Major, doggedly, as he shifted half an inch higher the box of cigars he was carrying under his arm. Nor, while he remained with us, could he be argued out of that conviction. He knew whither that young man was bound.

We lunched at an hotel—in a large, cool-shadowed apartment with green casements at the windows; and it was only now we remembered that one familiar face was missing from those casual encounters in the Valetta streets.

"Has no one seen Sappho?"—it was Mrs. Threepenny-bit who asked the question.

"She is remaining on board," answered Peggy.

"With the ship coaling!"

"She means to shut herself up in her cabin."

"She will be suffocated!"

"I don't suppose she'd mind," continued the sympathetic Peggy. "She has been quite heart-broken ever since the disappearance of Phaon; and nothing will set her right now until she has had it out with the Major—in scathing verse. Yes, there is something preparing for him that he little dreams of! And I must say I consider you people have been very cruel about Sappho. You never did like Phaon, to begin with——"

"I thought he was a disgusting little beast," observed Mrs. Threepenny-bit, calmly. "I would have given the butcher half-a-crown any day to chop his head off."

"Oh, just listen to her!" said Peggy, in awe-stricken tones. "No wonder the philo-

sophers say that the British have inherited the bloodthirstiness of the Romans, and that it breaks out from time to time, both in individuals and in masses. Well, Sappho has one friend on board; one who tries to understand her and sympathize with her. And you need not imagine she is always in a sombre and tragic mood; not even in her writing; she can be quite light-hearted and playful——"

"Sappho gloomy is bad enough; but Sappho gay must be overwhelming. A coy mastodon —an arch hippopotamus——"

"That's all you know," this intrepid American creature went on. "Yesterday afternoon I was in her cabin. She was showing me a number of pieces, I fancy to prove to me that she was not always grand and fierce; and I came upon a little drinking-song that was so quaint and charming I could not help copying it out——"

"A drinking-song—by Sappho?"

"Oh, I could show it to you if I chose,"

she proceeded, with the greatest coolness imaginable; "but I will do nothing of the kind. I know the prejudice with which it would be received. But it's good enough for *me*. I am not a slave to literary superstitions. I think this little piece of Sappho's is as fine as any of the Elizabethan lyrics; it is certainly more musical than any of Shakespeare's, and far more natural than any of Ben Jonson's. You needn't stare—the truth is the truth whether you like it or not——"

"But if it is so wonderful as you say, you might let us see it," Mrs. Threepenny-bit suggested.

"No."

"Come, now, Peggy!"

"No."

She was resolute. But so was her friend, and pertinacious; and at length, after a great deal of coaxing, Sappho's drinking song was produced. Here it is—Sappho in her lighter vein—

What is an air but you must sing to't?
What is this life that you should cling to't?
Life is a day,
Life is a play,
Your heavy heart is folly.

What is this love but to make madness?
What is this love but to make sadness?
Love is a day,
Love is a play,
But drinking is most jolly.

The paper was handed round. And then a kind of dejection fell upon us—and the waiter was asked to bring the bill.

When we eventually returned to the *Orotania*, we found that the Major had preceded us.

"Ah," said he to Lady Cameron, "you did not think we had been engaged in a noble kind of sport, coming through these Mediterranean seas? But we have, though—nothing less than spinning for shark! It never occurred to me that the odometer * must

* The odometer is a piece of wood over a foot in length, tapered, and grooved with metal so that it

look remarkably like a phantom-minnow; that is what I call fishing—a rope a hundred yards long, and a phantom minnow as thick as your wrist——"

"But did we get a bite?" said Peggy, eagerly — here was a tale to be told at Inverfask.

"You come and judge for yourself," said the Major.

So he got hold of a quartermaster to conduct us, and we all went along to a kind of storehouse for ships' gear, in which we found the odometer and its long coil of line.

"What do you call those?" he said, holding up the instrument, and showing us two white ivory-like objects sticking in the wood. "A bite? These are two of the beast's teeth! I wonder what he thought he had struck

revolves in the water according to the vessel's rate of speed. It is let out astern at the end of a long line; and the number of revolutions is recorded on a dial fixed to the taffrail.

when his jaws snapped together on this unholy fish."

"Oh, really!" said she, examining the embedded fangs with a good deal of curiosity. "Well, one is not expected to weep tears of sentiment over a disappointed shark, even if it goes away with a bad toothache. And what are you going to do with these things?"

The Major extricated them from the wood.

"I am commissioned by the second officer," he said, with a most polite bow, "to present them to you. You can have them made into a brooch, as a souvenir of the voyage; and there will always be the story to tell."

The young grass-widow was very much pleased, and, to tell the truth, she blushed just as the Baby might have done. For why had she, from amongst all the ladies on board, been singled out to receive this ingenuous compliment? But we had noticed all along that Peggy was a great favourite of those sailor-boys.

Altogether this had been a busily-occupied and not uninteresting day; but as evening drew near it was apparent that a vague feeling of apprehension was again asserting itself in our small circle, as if this one or that were beginning anew to ask questions of the future. At dinner Hitrovo came to our table—taking the place good-naturedly vacated by Emily Rosslyn. He seemed neither up nor down about his going away. Probably he would not even have referred to it, if it had not been mentioned; he appeared to regard it as a matter of no moment, as a quite casual thing that might have happened to any one. On the other hand, there was no such indifference about Wolfenberg. He was for the most part silent; and grave and reserved beyond his wont; and again and again he regarded the younger man with an earnest contemplation, as if he were trying to read his true character behind his features and manner and talk. Mrs. Dumaresq, also, was silent; and kept

glancing from one to the other as if she were dimly afraid of some impending catastrophe: that, however, was nothing new.

But it was Amélie herself, as usual, who was the dominating presence. And she seemed determined to show that for her this was no sentimental occasion; that she was not inclined to play a part in the familiar comedy of two languishing lovers about to be separated. Self-assertive, merry, wayward, downright of speech, she laughed, and talked, and challenged contradiction; striking here and there with her ruthless iconoclasm; pronouncing on all kinds of subjects, from the Conversion of the Jews—'the only conversion a Jew cares a cent about,' she said, 'is the conversion of Government Bonds'—to the National Debt: 'isn't it an extraordinary thing,' she said, 'that a man is not ashamed to let his country be in a condition that he himself, if he were in that condition, would regard as simply disgraceful? Why, you

English are at this moment hopelessly bankrupt, the whole lot of you, and yet each one of you walks about quite proudly as if you did not owe any man a farthing.' We observed she did not say anything about the Russian National Debt: perhaps that was an oversight.

Of course she had sooner or later to make some reference to Hitrovo's leaving.

"Paul," she said (for now she addressed him by his Christian name quite openly) "do you know what is proposed?—a race between you and us as to which shall get first to Tilbury."

He looked at her—as if for information; and then withdrew his eyes: he did not seem to be interested.

"When does this ship sail?" she demanded of the table generally.

"Midnight."

"Why so late?"

"Because it is so nominated in the bond."

"It is absurd!" she exclaimed, impatiently. "Why not set out now?—or at nine, or ten?"

She turned to Hitrovo. "It is no matter. We shall have a good start; so you must make haste with your railway-journeys if you wish to win. What do you think? Shall you be there before us?"

"Quite possible," he said.

"Your steamer sails for Marseilles to-morrow morning?—and then?"

"Then I have to go to Nice," he made answer, simply enough.

"But you will be at Marseilles before we reach Gibraltar," she said. "You must send me a telegram to Gibraltar."

"If you like it, yes," he responded—he seemed to be indifferent, yet willing to please her in a way.

Later on that night a small group of people had collected at the top of the accommodation-ladder. There was quite a picturesque scene around; for all the great world of darkness was alive with points of fire. High up on the unseen rock the terraced houses were illuminated;

the heavens overhead were clear, and besides the palely trembling stars there were one or two lambent planets; far away at the mouth of the harbour, twin crimson rays streamed through the dusk; and in the wide harbour itself the various golden points told of the riding-lights of invisible ships. At the foot of the ladder there was a rowing boat—a lamp hung astern. Then Hitrovo appeared; and Amélie, and Mrs. Dumaresq. He had no luggage with him: that had been sent ashore during the day.

There was some hand-shaking and bidding of good-bye; but everybody seemed to understand that it was Amélie Dumaresq who was really to wish him farewell. And in her way of doing it there certainly was no kind of agonised tenderness—whatever may have been the nature of their adieux elsewhere. She was at the gangway. As he went down the steps, she called out quite gaily, "Take care you don't fall in!" And again, when he had

taken his place—when the two oars had struck deep flashes of phosphorescent silver into the water—and as the boat glided away, with the yellow lamp sending quivering reflections down on the oily black surface—again she called to him '*Da svidania!*' An answer came out of the dark; the wavering golden star disappeared in towards the shore; and the little knot of people began to disperse.

Amélie (brushing away a tear from her eyelashes) turned to Wolfenberg, and said cheerfully—

"The race has begun then, Ernest. And we shall have a good start, after all, if we sail at midnight."

CHAPTER V

UNDER THE ROCK.

At sea. Latitude ——? Longitude ——? And is it the rosy flush of the dawn that still lingers in the Baby's peachen cheeks?

She comes quickly forward; and at once it is evident that the tall and Junoesque maiden has allowed her ordinary calm of demeanour to be entirely lost and swallowed up in a pretty confusion of shyness, and embarrassment, and urgent and humble entreaty.

"I am so glad to find you alone!" she says. "For I want to ask a great favour of you—a very, very great favour—and I do hope you will say yes—and you have been so kind all the way through—so kind and discreet—Julian was saying so only last night——"

"Yes, but——"

"The letters have come," she goes on, rather breathlessly, "—the letters from Julian's relatives in London—and you cannot tell how pleased I am—they are all so considerate—Julian's sister in particular—I'm sure you could not have expected her to write to me quite affectionately——"

"I should certainly have expected it, if she knew you."

"But she doesn't!—and isn't it so good of her!" says this young creature, who seems to be of a warmly grateful disposition. "Well, I want you to take these letters—I know what a favour it is I am asking—please don't think I don't know—and if you would be so very, very kind as to show them to my sister—and—and tell her—the whole story——"

"Goodness gracious, why don't you go straight to her and tell her yourself?"

"Because—because I am afraid," she says—and the great, soft, timid eyes plead more

effectually than any words. "She might begin to ask questions—she might be angry. But she couldn't be angry with you. And I know she will do what you tell her; she will take your advice; she will be good-natured if you ask her to be good-natured. Then if you show her the letters, she will see that Julian's relatives are quite content——"

"And well they might be content!"

"Oh, there is my sister just come up. Now will you be so kind!—will you tell her the whole story—and ask her to be good-natured——"

"Very well. Give me the precious letters. The prayers of this congregation are requested for a young damsel in deep dismay."

Yet it was not till much later on—till nearly noon, in fact—that one had an opportunity of engaging Lady Cameron in a little private confabulation. And when this subject was cautiously approached, Peggy abruptly broke in—

"Yes, I know. My eyes have not been shut. I have noticed Julian Verrinder hanging around. But all the same I have been loth to warn Emily; I don't like to put such ideas into her head; and she is so inexperienced —so unlike other girls—her mind is set on such very different things—that I don't think it would ever occur to her that a young man meant flirtation, or love-making, or any nonsense of that kind. And then it will be all over very soon. In little more than a week we shall be in England; after that it is highly improbable that Mr. Verrinder will ever set eyes on her again."

"On the contrary, it is highly probable. These two are engaged to be married."

"What do you say! Engaged? Since when!"

"For some considerable time back."

"Some considerable time?—it is impossible! —it is impossible!" she exclaimed, with staring eyes.

"If you must know the whole story, then, they have been engaged all the way through this voyage. They were practically so when they joined the ship at Palermo; of course that was why Julian Verrinder made his appearance at the same moment—"

"And Emily—all this time—oh, the wretch! oh, the wicked young wretch!" cried Peggy, with eyes still further aghast. "Playing the meek saint, and carrying on these underhand pranks all the same! And what has been the meaning of this secrecy? Have these two been deliberately making a fool of us—"

"No, no. They are only timid young things—at least, your sister has been rather afraid of what you might say; and they thought you wouldn't mind so much if they could show you that this step had the approval of Julian Verrinder's family. To be such guileless innocents, they seem to have had a little touch of contrivance too. The Baby's photograph was taken in Constantinople; copies

sent home—no doubt Verrinder knew that her soft eyes would plead for her; and now here are the letters in answer—received at Malta yesterday——"

"And all this has been going on," said Peggy, apparently going back and back over those long weeks, "and that deceitful young wretch of a girl imposing on us all—the solemn eyes—the maiden bashfulness—and stolen interviews, I'll be bound, whenever our back was turned! It is the most shameful thing I ever heard of!——"

"But look how excellently it has all turned out. What objection can you have? He is of good family; he has a fair fortune; he is his own master; he is clever enough, as young men go; he is modest; he is over head and ears in love—and I rather suspect the Baby is so too; his friends are ready to welcome her. What more? How can there be any objection?"

"We can't have everybody," said Peggy,

rather snappishly, "coming over from the United States and marrying and settling in England."

"Everybody? Now consider this, and learn wisdom. When you get to London, and begin to overhaul your trunks, you will no doubt come upon the dust-cloak you wore on driving from Moudanieh to Broussa. If you shake it out, most likely a few particles will fall to the ground; so that a portion of the soil of Asia Minor will have been transferred to Great Britain. But that won't alter the earth's axis."

"Where is that young impostor and hypocrite?" said Peggy, abruptly rising. "I will go to her at once. She ought to be smacked!"

And away she went. But the interview, wheresoever it took place, could not have been a wrathful one; for when we all assembled at lunch, the Baby—though she was mostly silent—looked so happily and humbly and hopelessly grateful that her companions no

doubt began to consider themselves quite superior persons in that they allowed her to exist.

A little after mid-day we passed the solitary island of Pantellaria; and perhaps we envied the criminals permitted to pass year after year in that perfect climate, amid these shining blue seas. On the other hand, those volcanic islands occasionally perform the vanishing trick—disappearing whence they came: perhaps, indeed, that was the fond hope in the paternal mind of the Italian Government when Pantellaria was chosen to form a convict settlement. Then, towards evening, we drew near the African coast; and there was a dusky flare of sunset over the Gulf of Tunis. Twilight fell; and the steady red ray of Cape Bon shone remotely through the dusk.

At dinner this evening we had a startling piece of intelligence conveyed to us—that is to say, a piece of intelligence that might have been regarded as startling in the light of

certain wild conjectures and suspicions. All day long Amelie Dumaresq had kept pretty much to herself; reading in odd corners, or standing idly by the rail, and apparently disinclined for society or talk; it was a new thing to see her thus bereft of her usual whirlwindish activity and gay self-assertion. And perhaps it was to cheer her up a little that, as she took her place at table, Mrs. Threepenny-bit said to her, in a kindly fashion—

"Mr. Hitrovo must be well on his way to Marseilles now."

"I presume so," answered the young lady, with something of affected composure.

"It is strange how quickly one is missed," the elder woman proceeded, trying to say something that would please. "And in the case of Mr. Hitrovo, you might have thought his absence would not have been noticed particularly; for he kept very much in the background; he did not put himself forward in any way. Yet there has been a distinct

difference all day to-day; the ship has not been quite itself."

"I suppose they are wretched boats that run between Malta and Marseilles—I think I heard somebody say so," she remarked—as if the fact of Hitrovo's absence from the *Orotania* was a matter of very little import.

But it was at this point that Mrs. Dumaresq startled us—though no one dared to say a word.

"What was that, Amélie?" said the mother. "Do you mean the kind of people who travel by those boats? I'm sure I shall be glad to hear that Mr. Hitrovo has arrived safely in Vienna. It is such a risk—it is so imprudent—to be travelling about with all those diamonds in one's possession——"

"Diamonds?" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit inquiringly.

"Yes; Amélie's diamonds. He is taking them to Vienna to get them re-set for her."

For a second or so a most unaccountable

silence prevailed; and somehow we knew that this poor woman was anxiously scanning our faces, looking from one to the other, eager to catch the least little bit of tell-tale expression. The death-like stillness, brief as it was, proved most embarrassing: it was Mrs. Threepenny-bit who boldly threw herself into the breach.

"Oh, yes," she said, desperately. "I remember Amélie telling me that she was dissatisfied with the setting. For my own part I rather like the old-fashioned settings; but when you have so many diamonds, perhaps it is better to have some uniform design. And of course Mr. Hitrovo is interested—he has a personal interest—in having them as handsome as possible; I dare say Amélie will wear them quite as much to please him as to please herself——"

And so she blundered on. But the anxious mother seemed somewhat relieved: it had in a way been demonstrated that the only imprudence that could occur to any one, or be

mentioned, was the imprudence of carrying valuable jewellery about the country in any circumstances whatever. And meanwhile Mrs. Threepenny-bit continued her incoherent talk, to cover the general constraint. She pointed out that, once the diamonds were in the artist's hand, there would be no further peril. Was he likely to send a sketch of the design to be approved? Perhaps Mr. Hitrovo would bring that on with him from Vienna? And so forth. During all this, Amélie had sate proud and cold and seemingly indifferent. She had not spoken a word.

Nor, indeed, when our small coterie subsequently withdrew to their accustomed after-dinner retreat, did any one seem inclined to re-open that subject. It was too dangerous. No one would confess to the sudden and hidden alarm that had followed Mrs. Dumaresq's announcement. Because, after all, was it not too absurd to suppose that Hitrovo—whatever else might be thought of him—could

be guilty of the base and brutal act of absconding with a packet of jewels? To take human motives at their lowest, was he likely to throw away his chance of winning a rich and beautiful and fascinating heiress for the sake of the immediate gain of a handful of crescents and pendants? And what had the young man done, or said, or shown himself, that we should gratuitously assume him to be a common thief?

But there were other aspects of this peculiar situation.

"Missis," said Peggy, at last, "she has given him those diamonds out of bravado. It is a piece of defiance on her part."

"Why should you think so?" said the other —averting her eyes.

"It seems clear enough. She may have guessed or suspected that Hitrovo had not made himself much of a favourite in certain quarters—had not established friendly and intimate relations, as Mr. Wolfenberg has

done, for example; and it is not unlikely, too, that she had grown impatient of her mother's nervous timidity. Then here is her answer. This is a proof of her trust. She says: 'You may suspect or dislike, if you choose; but I know this man; and this is how I show it.' Indeed, my idea of her is that she is so proud as to be capable of flinging her diamonds into the sea rather than confessing she had the least shadow of a doubt."

"Yes, but, after all, Peggy," said her companion (fishing for frankness, but exhibiting none), "I do not understand why you should regard such a thing as a test of her faith in him. It probably never occurred to her. She is severely logical. She knows that when a woman has entrusted her whole life's happiness to a man, the question of the safety or non-safety of a case of jewellery is a very trivial matter. Where is there any bravado in that; where is there any challenge? It was quite natural she should give the diamonds into his

care, if he said he knew a jeweller in Vienna who could properly re-set them. That is a small thing—when a woman has once given herself to a man. Trusting herself to him, she might very well trust the custody of her jewel-case. I dare say it never occurred to her that there could be any risk. Indeed it is impossible to think there could be any risk!"

Then Peggy spoke up.

"And if it is impossible to think it, why did you seem so startled when Mrs. Dumaresq told you; and why were you so breathless in continuing the conversation, so as to hide your alarm? Come, now, Missis! I don't say you were alone in what you thought—or feared. And perhaps it was very mad and wicked of us—and very unreasoning—that any such suggestion should have flashed into our minds; but still—still—it was an unexpected announcement; and Hitrovo was always more or less of a stranger and an enigma to us; and—and all that Amélie

Dumaresq can know of him she must have learnt within the last month and a half; and it does seem rather bold that she should entrust him with £4,000 or £5,000 worth of jewellery—so bold that, as I say, it looks like defiance."

"She has entrusted him with more than that, Peggy, whatever comes of it," said the other woman, gravely. "She has entrusted him with her life. And after all," she continued, with something more of cheerfulness, "you have got to consider that you can learn a good deal about any human being in a month and a half on board ship. That is what Wolfenberg always says. He relies on Amélie's acute intelligence, her strong judgment, her determination to know the truth of things. She is not likely to be blinded by sentiment or romance. And if a little bit of bravado did enter into her handing over those diamonds to Hitrovo, well, you know there is pretty often a touch of the

poseuse about her; she likes doing things for effect; and Mrs. Dumaresq had clearly been commissioned to make that announcement at the dinner-table."

When Wolfenberg turned up, a little later on, he was enthusiastic about the singular brilliancy of the night—the great over-arching vault, throbbing with its millions and millions of stars, seeming all the more vast and luminous because of the black solidity of the sea. But it soon appeared that he, also, had been thinking over the incident of the diamonds; for he said, in a casual kind of way——

"I wonder if Amélie really imagines that the Viennese jewellers are the best in Europe? But she never stops to ask advice; she is so impetuous and wilful; the whim of the moment is enough. I doubt if she would take the trouble to give Hitrovo any instructions; though it is a serious matter—the formation of a family heirloom, as it were;

and of course she ought to have had designs submitted to her. He is going to telegraph to Gibraltar; if he sends his address she might telegraph back, and suggest to him to have some drawings made—don't you think so?"

Mrs. Threepenny-bit did not seem inclined to interfere: it was all very well for him, as an artist, to advise. Then he said——

"I should not myself like to be tumbling about from steamer-wharves to railway-stations with £5,000 worth of jewellery under my care. Too much responsibility. I should like to have it deposited with my bankers as soon as possible, or handed over to the jewellers, which would be the same thing, of course. Amélie has always been foolhardy about those diamonds of hers. They are too valuable to be carried about and used as a toy. And yet she has shown some philosophy about it too. Life has always been the great thing with her—the actual enjoyment of living; and its accessories, big or little, she has re-

garded as being of very minor importance. Let her bask in sunlight, and breathe sweet air, and rejoice in the animation and gaiety of the society of friends around her—that is enough: the loss of money or diamonds could never affect her. Once, indeed," he went on, more absently, "one object did enter into her life that for a while seemed almost as important as life itself. Her devotion to art—her resolute ambition—had complete possession of her. And yet that all seems to have vanished. No doubt there is something else, of equal value and importance, perhaps of greater value and importance, in its place."

He spoke a good deal about Amélie this evening; but with no kind of confession that the disappearance of Hitrovo with her case of jewels had caused him the least disquietude. Nor did the two women-folk reveal what was in their minds until they were bidding each other good-night. Then said the elder of them—

"Well, Peggy, if what we wickedly, and I hope absurdly thought, the moment Mrs. Dumaresq told us, should come true, there is one fortunate thing about it: the loss of her diamonds will not be too long a price for Amélie Dumaresq to have paid for finding out in time."

"That is so, Missis," responded Peggy; "but let us hope it is only we who have been frightened by the sudden announcement and the peculiar circumstances. And if we should ever see Mrs. Paul Hitrovo at some grand festivity in London, we shan't be able to look at those diamonds without remembering—and being a little bit ashamed of our suspicions. Good-night!"

"Good-night, dear!—and a more charitable mind to all of us!"

The next two or three days were devoid of incident, except that we ran into successive shoals of flying-fish; and it was quite a welcome novelty to watch the long, wavering,

uncertain flight of those silvery creatures, with here and there one of them striking the crest of a wave and making a further shoot before final submergence. And then, in due course of time, we came in sight of the dappled hills of Spain—the brown and yellow slopes of the Sierra Nevada; with, nearer at hand, the green vineyards of Almeria. And yet again, and early one morning, we slowed round the great grey Rock, and entered the well-known harbour; and there before us were the old familiar landmarks—the Alameda Gardens, Jumper's Bastion, the Ragged-Staff stairs—all quite home-like, as Mrs. Threepenny-bit declared, with her eyes grown affectionate and kind.

And here were the letters, newspapers, and what not. Wolfenberg seemed a little concerned—in a furtive kind of way—as these were being sorted out.

"If there is a telegram for Miss Dumaresq," he said to the third officer, "I will take it to her."

But apparently there was no telegram for Miss Dumaresq.

"Are you quite sure?" he asked; and then —when the unclaimed portion of the mail had been placed conspicuously on the top of the saloon skylight—he went carefully over every envelope. Just at this point Amélie Dumaresq came along.

"I am afraid there is no telegram for you, Amélie," said he.

Now she had been going straight up to that displayed correspondence; but the instant she heard those words she turned aside, with a fine air of carelessness.

"I knew it!—isn't he a lazy wretch!" she said to Mrs. Threepenny-bit; and she was laughing, or affecting to laugh. "Unless you are at his elbow, prompting him, he will do nothing: of course he forgot all about the telegram the moment he left the ship——"

"But, Amélie," said Wolfenberg, "you must remember he may have had no chance of

sending you a telegram. From Malta to Marseilles is a long voyage; and I dare say the steamers are small and of no great speed; and then I doubt whether there is any direct cable——"

She waved aside all this humble solicitude.

"It is not of the least consequence," she said. And then she went on, with her usual gay audacity: "I suppose you English people are tremendously proud of this lump of a rock, and the secret galleries, and hidden cannon. But what I am anxious to discover is the hour at which the regimental band plays in the gardens. My ears seem to be hungering for something new; and your military bands are rather good, aren't they?"

"Missis, will the Black Watch have their pipers with them?" demanded Peggy, suddenly —forgetting she had vowed she would not land at Gib.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, answering them both at once. "But we will

call on the ——s, and they will tell us everything; and then, Peggy, you will see what kind of quarters the officers' wives and families have."

"And will you take me with you?" continued Miss Dumaresq, with a quite charming frankness. "Should I be intruding? Mother would rather remain on board. If you don't mind——"

"Oh, by all means you must come with us," the elder woman responded, promptly. "And then we will bring back the ——s with us to lunch: the Scorpions are always glad to get off their Rock for an hour or two, to look at some fresh English faces."

Thus it was that Amélie Dumaresq went ashore with us, making all the time a very brave show of being entirely unchagrined and unconcerned. Nay, she flatly refused to walk as far as the telegraph-office, where we might have asked whether all the telegrams for the *Orotania* had been forwarded. Apparently

she was not thinking of her own affairs at all: she professed, on the other hand, the most lively and sympathetic interest in the spectacle presented by our two young lovers, who could now, without fear of animadversion, consort together a little more openly. And a very pretty spectacle it was—as we paid our early calls, and thereafter drove away round to the small village of Catalan, at the back of the Rock; for the Baby was shy and proud, and would have no stranger surmise; while Julian Verrinder, naturally enough, rather wanted to assert his right of possession. Peggy had grown quite placable over this affair; and seemed to regard them with an amused forbearance, as a couple of irresponsible children.

We had to sail at two; so there was no more than time to pick up our friends and carry them on board for lunch. And here also Amélie Dumaresq was at her best and brightest; quite fascinating these new acquaintances with her wit and wilfulness, her malicious

pleasantries, her gay good-humour. Other people were despatching messages ashore; one or two had actually received telegrams; but she had no thought for any such things. Then we had to go on deck to bid our guests adieu; and here she was also, smiling, observant, interested—as the great long boat, with its six rowers, made away in for the land.

"No," said Peggy, some little time thereafter, "she wouldn't acknowledge she cared one farthing whether there was or was not a telegram for her at Gibraltar. She has a splendid courage."

"Peggy," said the smaller woman, "it was very well done. And do you know why it was done with such spirit and effect? She is nerving herself for Tilbury—for whatever may happen."

CHAPTER VI.

BRAVING OUT.

"Poor Sappho!" says our well-beloved Peggy, as we are walking up and down the deck early next morning. "She is in agony. All the peace, and rest, and charm of the voyage have fled, so far as she is concerned. To begin with, she has had to abandon the Requiem for Phaon's ocean-grave; she was so distracted by various emotions that she could not get on; and she tells me she cannot write unless she is possessed by one all-devouring whirlwind of flame. Very well; she has put the Requiem and everything else aside now; and has given herself up entirely — to Revenge!"

"Yes?"

"The Major," continues Peggy—looking discreetly around; but there is no one within hail—"the Major will be a poor, and sick, and sorry man when he finds a portrait of himself in Sappho's novel. Yes, indeed! And that is what is driving her about mad just now—the terrible business of pulling the book to pieces, in order to introduce this new character. Fortunately, it so happens that among all the types of your English fashionable life that she has been lashing and scourging with whips, she had omitted the military type; and so now comes in the Major, the hired mercenary, the brainless elderly fop, the butcher of his kind, the paid assassin. I suppose, in saying all these pretty things, she forgot that my husband was a soldier; but she was in such a rage I did not dare to remind her; one did not know what might happen. In fact, the only question she would consider calmly was whether she could properly place a simple Major — a poor,

common, plebeian Major—in the noble and splendid circles she describes. Oh, I assure you," Peggy goes on, with garrulous good-nature, "you will find a gorgeous set of creatures in Sappho's book: at the same time I wish she wouldn't so frequently use the word 'vulgar'—it's a little kitchen-maidish."

Here Peggy's hand steals furtively into her pocket.

"Say, now," proceeds this young American person, whose face is all glorified by the light reflected upwards from the sea, under the shadow of the stretched canvas overhead—"are you in a good humour this morning? No envy — no spite — no uncharitableness? You would give fair consideration? You would honestly admit merit? No mean jealousy—no impossible standards——"

"What is it you have filched away from her this time? Produce it!"

"To tell you the truth," says Peggy, as

she unfolds a small sheet of paper, "when Sappho lends me these things, I don't think it is merely that I should study them in my own cabin. I fancy she is not wholly averse to their being shown to one or two favoured persons."

Well, here is the latest fragment of the Æolian muse:

Blood, blood, blood, and blood,
That the waters will not drown!
Wild arms stretched upward from the flood—
He shrieked as he went down.

White, white, white, and white
A wan soul wings the sky:
The crawling sea is black with night—
Ah, God! that lonesome cry!

Lost, lost, lost, and lost!
The earth is damp and cold:
Two hands upon a bosom crossed:
(The were-wolf stalks the wold).

"But what did he do?" one naturally asks.

"He? Who? Can't you understand?" says Peggy, impatiently. "It is a picture. It is a tragedy revealed as if by a flash of

lightning. The woman drowns her lover in the flood; and then, overcome by remorse, she sinks to the ground, and dies——"

"Yes, yes; but the were-wolf: what did he do? Did he bite?"

"You don't seem to understand!" says Peggy, angrily. "This is not a story. Have you no imagination? Cannot you realise the scene—the terrible thing that has happened—without asking for more incident?"

"But the were-wolf: he is the gentleman whose presence is unexplained. What did he do when he came along and found her lying on the ground? Did he bite her?"

Peggy snatched away the fragment.

"They talk about the humane influence of letters!" she said. "I believe literature breeds nothing but hatred and malice and detraction. Never mind: I mean to tell her that there is a distinct vein of originality in her poems such as is not to be met with in any other poet, living or dead." And there-

with she returned the folded sheet of paper to her pocket; and that opportunely; for now our Orotanians began to appear—to get a draught of sea-air and sunlight before going down to breakfast.

We were now making steadily home for England, following almost the same line by which we had come south about six weeks before. And what strange things had happened to one or two of us in that brief space of time—had happened so gradually and imperceptibly that it was only now we were beginning to realise their full import. For these altered circumstances, with all their change of plan and project, seemed to be impressed on us the more vividly by the fact that in but a few days we should be within sight of English shores.

Wolfenberg came along to us.

"I suppose it must have been about here," he said, "on the outward voyage, that you went below to look at Amélie's drawings.

I think you were rather impressed. You spoke of the reception she would get in London, if she exhibited. And now she is going back to London—but not for that."

He was ordinarily so careful in guarding against any expression of regret over recent events that we hardly knew how to take this speech.

"Yes, I think the world has lost a great artist," he continued. "Whatever else may happen, that is about one thing sure. Did I ever tell you of a subject I had thought out for Amélie?—a subject better worthy of her powers than the children dancing in New York streets, though she would have made that fine too. But this was more important; it would have taxed her strength; and she would have been equal to it. The incident occurred in the reign of Domitian. Two peasants, who claimed to be of royal origin, were brought before the Emperor, or his representative in Judæa; they were the grand-

sons of Jude, the brother of Jesus. But it directly appeared that it was no earthly crown they had in their mind; they were looking forward to the immediate coming of the Kingdom of Heaven; and in the meantime they only wished to be allowed to return to their small farms, to till their fields. Can you see what she would have made of such a group?—the bullet-headed Roman, callous and contemptuous; the bystanders inclined to laugh; the two peasants in their common garb——"

Yes, we could see easily enough; and could imagine that in Amélie Dumaresq's treatment of such a subject there would be a harsh, unsparing truth that would be sufficiently strong and effective. But, if it came to that, was there not an artist nearer at hand more capable of dealing with such a theme—more capable of lifting it out of the atmosphere of mere verisimilitude? The curious, and perhaps even compassionate, Roman, she could have tackled well enough; and also she might

have brought her brutality of touch to bear on the people grinning at these poor harmless maniacs; but who could have painted for us, with understanding and sympathy and revelation, the two swarthy and mystic-eyed Syrians, silent, oblivious of both curiosity and ribaldry, and, in spite of their rude goat-skins and battered sandals, 'trailing clouds of glory' with them, the glory of their inheritance, and their faith, and their dreams? That was not for Amélie Dumaresq: that was for another. But this man, now as ever forgetful of himself, was trying to look only with her eyes.

Of a sudden he appeared to recall himself.

"Ah, well, well," he said, "one must not complain. Everything is for the best, if she is going forward to that settlement of her life, that security of happiness, on which she seems to have fixed her whole desire. For that is always the way with Amélie. Intensity, concentration: one object only must

occupy her whole existence, to the exclusion of everything else. And as I have said before 'The world has many artists; she has but the one world.'"

"You put her welfare, her contentment, before everything: you think of nothing but her," said the small creature who was receiving these confidences; but it was in no tone of reproach; rather she was regarding him with evident favour and perhaps even with some touch of admiration.

"There is nothing I would not do for her," he said, simply. "There is no sacrifice I would not make for her. And all the reward I should ask for, and hope for, would be just this: if I were dying I should like her to come and see me—for a minute; I should like her to come to the bedside, and take my hand, and say 'Ernest, you tried to be a good friend to me always.' But that, of course, is a mere piece of sentiment. I dare say Amélie would laugh at it——"

"She would be a most unnatural and ungrateful woman if she did," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, warmly; but at this point the conversation was interrupted; for there was a sudden ringing of a bell; and presently the whole vessel was in commotion with fire-alarm drill. By the time the clamour had ceased, Wolfenberg had been carried off by the Dumaresqs, on some behest or other.

But all this while not one word had been uttered about certain dark fears and suspicions. Nay, it was quite the other way. When we came together again at lunch, it was almost pathetic to observe the cheerful and hopeful fashion in which Wolfenberg, talking to Amélie Dumaresq, would cunningly insinuate that the future had nothing but smiles and certainties for her. Had he forgotten the absence of any telegram at Gibraltar; or did he assume that such a trifle was of no importance? At all events, whatever anxiety there may have been in his

mind, he betrayed none: on the contrary, he was now chatting to her, or addressing the table generally, with an air of studied equanimity.

"Plymouth," he said, as he consulted a certain 'Table of Probable Times of Arrival and Departure.' "Plymouth, 1 p.m., on the 13th. And we have been punctual to the hour all the way through: why not also at Plymouth? So, you see, Amelie, if Mr. Hitrovo chanced to get to London a day or two before us, there is no reason why he should not run down and meet us at Plymouth, and sail up the Channel with us. Wouldn't that be a pleasant surprise for you?"

She glanced towards him with a curious, quick look—of watchfulness and inquiry: then her eyes became inscrutable again.

"It is hardly probable," she said, with something of carelessness. "He would most likely be a couple of days in Nice. Then it

is a long railway journey from Vienna to Calais. I should think there wasn't much chance of his appearing at Plymouth."

"Ah, I don't know—I don't know," he said, encouragingly. "When trains have once started, they soon beat steam-ships——"

"Besides," she added, with a smile, "even if he were in London, I doubt whether he would come away down to Plymouth: he is too lazy. It would not occur to him. He might do it if some one were at his elbow to prompt him; otherwise he would simply wait."

"You will see—you will see," Wolfenberg said to her, in kindly fashion. "I would advise you to borrow a telescope from one of the officers as we are going into Plymouth Sound."

At this she raised her head, and regarded him with wide-staring eyes.

"Oh, do you think I am so anxious, then?" she demanded.

But here the mother interposed.

"Amélie," said she, "you don't give Mr. Hitrovo a very good character for thoughtfulness and promptitude——"

"He has plenty of other good qualities—plenty——"

"At all events, I hope he will hand over those diamonds to the jeweller the moment he reaches Vienna," the nervous, white-haired woman went on. "I cannot bear the idea of a young man travelling about with such a valuable casket under his care. Why, it is not safe for himself!"

Amélie laughed—in rather a forced way.

"I know what will happen," she said. "As likely as not you will find him turning up in London with the diamonds in precisely the same condition as when he took them away, and with not even a design made. He will have forgotten all about them."

Then there was silence: no one seemed anxious to pursue the subject.

But it was about this time that we more

particularly remarked the singular change that had come over Amélie Dumaresq's manner towards us. In which connection it ought to be said that whatever relationship existed between her and our women-folk had been solely and wholly based on advances made by herself. Though she might have been to them a curious study in human nature, they had not sought to cultivate any obtrusive intimacy; it was rather she who had, in her frank, offhand, downright way, appropriated them, and extorted interest in herself and her doings and her bizarre opinions. But now she seemed to regard them with a certain coldness, not to say defiance—unconscious as they were of having given her any cause of offence. She was no longer bubbling over with happiness, and eager to sweep all her immediate neighbours into the full-flowing current of her present delight and anticipation of the future. We could see the change most easily in her eyes.

Those beautiful, lustrous, dark orbs had always given us the impression that behind them was an abundant and joyous life that seemed to challenge and demand sympathy, approval, and co-operation: now there was a certain distance, a kind of scanning, in their look. We had done nothing. We had breathed no word, outside our own small circle, in connection with the disappearance of the diamonds; we had uttered no comment on the absence of any telegram at Gib. But she seemed to suspect us somehow. And especially before the women-folk she was inordinately and effusively affectionate towards her mother. It was 'Mimsey' this, and 'Matushka' that, every other sentence, if Mrs. Threepenny-bit and Lady Cameron happened to be looking on. It was altogether an enigmatical situation of affairs; and meanwhile we were slowly steaming northwards towards England—at an equable rate of about ten or a dozen knots an hour.

We could not forget, however, that, slow or fast as our progress might be, we had two young folk with us who did not seem to care. At first sight a steamship might appear to be a poor substitute for Lovers'-land. Lovers'-land ought to be Herrick's land—with prim rose glades and cowslip meadows, rustic stiles and apple-orchards, posies, kirtles, shepherds' crooks, and lads and lasses gone a-Maying. Nevertheless, when all is said and done, a ship will serve. There are many nooks and corners about it, furnishing what may be discreetly called 'occasions.' These two young creatures, for example: what hindered them from being up in the early morning, with the quarter-deck all to themselves, the shining blue sea all around them, the long pathway of seething foam away astern? Then, during the day, there were all kinds of occupations and expeditions together—to feed the captured birds; to play chess in the empty fore-saloon; or, in the chief saloon—

with the wind-sails in the ports blowing in cool draughts of air—to sit and listen to the musical maidens who, standing by the piano, were busy with 'Here's a health unto her,' or 'Down, down, hey, derry down,' or 'Though seas between us roll, love.' But it was at night they had their chief chance; for the ship's lamps were far apart; there were long spaces of dusk; and you could not make out which were the figures standing by the rail, with the great black sea beyond, and the dome of palpitating stars overhead. Murmured talk—a glance—a touch of the hand—this was sufficient to have 'the golden age—the golden age come back'; and they could do very well without daisied meads, and frisking lambs, and Corinna's ribbons. And it is possible that there may have been a sort of unrecognised conspiracy to leave those two alone. Peggy, it is true, was still a little nettled about having been tricked; but everybody else was benignant. Wolfen-

berg had worked at his wedding-present until it was worth a good deal more than the 300*l.* which young Verrinder understood — and hoped—he would have to pay for the coveted sketch.

In crossing the Bay of Biscay we ran into a series of hot and enervating mists; and these, as we drew near the mouth of the English Channel, gave way to a dense fog; so that on the first occasion during this long voyage it seemed probable we should fall away from our fixed time.

"You must not be disappointed, Amélie," said Wolfenberg, at dinner, "if Mr. Hitrovo does not meet you at Plymouth. For if he hears that there has been fog in the Bay of Biscay, he must know that the steamer would be indefinitely delayed, and most likely he would not care to go down and wait on chance."

She did not answer.

"It is different as regards Tilbury," he said,

with much cheerfulness. "Quite different. For, you see, they will know in London when we reach Plymouth; and Tilbury is twenty-four hours after; I don't suppose the fog in the Channel, assuming that there is any, will hinder us so very much. There is a hotel at Tilbury, I think? You must remember, Amélie, he never undertook to meet you at Plymouth: that was only a fancy of mine. The race was for Tilbury. But what were the stakes?—what was the bet?"

"I don't know—I don't remember," she said, calmly.

She either was indifferent, or successfully affected indifference; but her mother, each time that Hitrovo's name was mentioned, looked quickly up, and glanced from one to the other, in a nervous and apprehensive fashion. And she seemed anxious that we should not be delayed on our way to London.

"I hear that quite a number mean to land at Plymouth to-morrow, and go on to London

by rail," said Lady Cameron to our Mrs. Threepenny-bit. "Why is that, now? The saving in time can be very little—as compared with the length of the voyage. Or is it the fogs they are afraid of? It can't be sea-sickness, in a big boat like this; besides, we have all become hardened sailors. And yet I don't know: you English people appear to have a perfectly overwhelming and inexplicable dread of the Channel——"

"Not so inexplicable, Peggy, if you only knew," her friend made answer, with serious eyes. "You don't understand how largely the Channel enters into English life. Consider this, for example. The young Briton, the moment he marries, must needs drag his bride away abroad; and the very first thing they encounter is the Channel. All during the courting-time," continues this profound philosopher, "these two have been showing off the best side of their character to each other: she is ignorant of him; he is ignorant of her.

What opens their eyes? The Channel. They get down to Dover; they go on board a small steamer: the jabbling water flings about the cockle-shell anyhow; and of course they become ill——"

"*Nos et mutamur* in illness."

"What's that? And then their true dispositions leak out. If he is selfish, he appears a downright brute; if she is petulant and ill-tempered, she becomes unbearable. If you only knew how many married lives have been ruined by those choppy seas, perhaps you would have a dread of the English Channel too. And Emily there—if she is wise—when the happy time comes—she will know what to avoid——"

The poor Baby! She had been listening, with her great, soft, pathetic eyes deeply interested; and this sudden calling attention to her startled her into self-consciousness, and summoned swift colour to her face.

"That is a long way off yet," she said, with

a pretty innocence—and not pretending to misunderstand. "And I know Julian will go wherever I ask him to go, so that there need not be any crossing of the Channel."

"That is right," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with kindly approval. "Young people cannot be too careful—especially at first."

In consequence of these fogs we did not reach Plymouth till the following evening; and the tender that came out to take off the shore-going folk, with its yellow lamps glimmering through this vague, dark world of mist, was a spectral kind of thing. Hitrovo was not on board; nor had he sent any letter or telegram.

"Of course not," said Amélie Dumaresq, with a careless bit of a laugh. "He's too lazy for anything."

"Oh, but you must not take it for granted he has had time to reach England," Wolfenberg said to her at once. "Not at all. How can you tell? We may have won in the race

from Malta. Why, Amélie," he went on—but with some little hesitation—and he regarded her the while—"even if you should not find him at Tilbury to-morrow or next day—well—you ought not to be disappointed——"

"Disappointed?" she said, with a kind of merriment. "Do you imagine I do not understand Monsieur Paul by this time?"

Then the people who had been our shipmates for so long began to go down the gangway to the tender—shadowy phantoms they seemed descending into that grey gulf; and presently there were farewell messages being called backwards and forwards. It was a ghostly leave-taking—in this encircling gloom. Finally the smaller vessel, with its dim lights growing dimmer, crept away into the fog and disappeared; and many and strange (as we afterwards heard) were the adventures it encountered before it carried its living freight securely to land; but these do not concern us here.

We lay anchored in Plymouth harbour that night on account of the fog; had a pleasant run up Channel next day; and on the following morning found ourselves approaching the estuary of the Thames. And it needed but a single glance out of a port to convince us that we had indeed reached old England; for here were wild squalls of rain flying hither and thither; and gusts of wind that hurried onwards the lowering clouds; and a wide expanse of lapping, muddy-yellow water; and far-extending flat shores stretching away beneath grey, and cold, and cheerless skies. The poor Orotanians began to get out their ulsters; and sought refuge from the wet under the awnings that hitherto had sheltered them from the blaze of the sun. And so we crept slowly along the channels, gradually leaving behind us the Girdler, and the Mouse, and the Nore; until, about mid-day, we came in sight of Tilbury Docks and the small pier fronting the river.

It was Wolfenberg who betrayed most concern, despite his strenuous efforts to appear quite calm and confident and assured. He would continue talking about indifferent matters; but ever and anon his eyes would be stealthily and earnestly directed towards that distant platform and the tender lying alongside. And even we bystanders began to be in sympathy with his eager desire. We hoped that Hitrovo would be there; and that all would go well and happily. For we had not spent this long time in close conjunction with such a nature as that of Amélie Dumaresq without having become profoundly interested; and we could not but conjecture how her proud and passionate spirit would brook an open mark of neglect. We, also, strained our eyes towards the pier and the small steamer; and even employed field-glasses—when no one was looking; until, indeed, the loud command issued from the bridge, 'LET GO THE ANCHOR!'—and a roar of iron

chain forward told us that the good ship *Orotania* had brought us all safely home again.

The tender came out. There were two or three gentlemen on board—no doubt friends of the passengers. But by this time suspicion had deepened into certainty: Paul Hitrovo was neither on the pier nor yet on the small steamer now approaching. Whatever might be the reason, he had failed to keep his appointment.

"The fogs have made everything so uncertain," Wolfenberg said to her, with anxious solicitude. "He may not have heard of our arrival at Plymouth. Or he may be waiting for you at Fenchurch Street——"

"Oh, don't bother about it, Ernest," she said, briefly. "No doubt there will be a letter or telegram waiting for us at Glimmer's."

She was pale, but perhaps not much more so than usual: it was her lips, usually so rich of hue, that showed a lack of colour—they

seemed a little dry and contracted. She was proud, and calm, and self-possessed; she maintained an absolute silence; and she regarded, in a cold, impassive, mechanical way, the various preparations for our getting ashore.

Thereafter we had our own immediate affairs to attend to, so we lost sight of those three; nor did we even go up to town with them in the same railway-carriage. But at Fenchurch Street we ran against them once more; and Wolfenberg promised to come round and see us in the evening; there was a silent understanding that he might have news.

It was about nine o'clock when he called. He appeared to be in a jaunty and off-hand mood—different from his ordinarily grave and simple ways.

"So you are getting settled down?" he said to our women-folk. "The roar of London sounds strange after the quiet and solitude of those blue seas, does it not? And yet I must be off again on my travels to-morrow;

at least, I fear so; to Paris, that is—yes, to Paris; to finish up some business matters. I hope you will all go round to Glimmer's and see Amélie and her mother; they are not very familiar with London. And if you will be so exceedingly kind, I am sure you won't find it difficult to interest and amuse them: pictures and music are what they care for most."

Nothing was said about what was present to all minds; but as he was going away—and when one of us had gone down into the hall with him—his manner entirely changed.

"What was the name of the hotel in Vienna," he asked hurriedly, and in a low voice so that those others should not hear, "that Hitrovo said he had rooms in—overlooking the river—he spoke of the view——"

"The Hotel Métropole."

"I am off for Vienna to-morrow," he said, "if there is neither letter nor telegram in the morning. There has been no message from

him of any sort. Only, the Dumaresqs must not suspect where I have gone. Say that it is Paris—I have a lot of pictures there I must bring over. And will you go and see Amélie as often as you can?—if your ladies will be so kind, I am sure she would be most grateful —she will be lonely at first in this great city."

Her—her, ever and always. He seemed to have no other thought.

CHAPTER VII.

COMINGS AND GOINGS.

THE next few days were quite uneventful; that was the tragic part of it. Every hour that went by seemed to increase Mrs. Dumaresq's alarm and terror; and all the more so that she durst not speak. Then came a morning on which Amélie, taking her maid with her, had gone out on some errand; and the poor mother, seizing her opportunity, stole hurriedly along to us.

"What can it mean—what can it mean!" she cried in piteous accents; and the tired, pathetic eyes were full of trouble. "Not a word or a sign from him! He must know that we are in England—that we are in London; he must have seen the arrival of the *Orotania*

announced in the newspapers. What can be the reason of it! He cannot have been murdered—we should have heard of it——"

"Surely," said our Mrs. Threepenny-bit, "Amélie herself could find out. Why does she not telegraph to him?—no doubt she has his address——"

"Amélie?" repeated the other, shaking her head sadly: it was clear she had already contemplated this course. "You do not know her! Where her pride is concerned, she is like a rock. You might go down on your knees to her, and she would not move. She pretends that nothing has happened. She goes about her daily life as if nothing had happened. This morning she is away to her dentist. This afternoon her dressmaker is coming. She would kill herself, or let herself be killed, twenty times over, rather than have her pride humbled; it is a passion with her; she has been like that since her childhood. Any other girl, apparently forsaken in

this way, would throw herself on her bed and cry for hours; but Amélie—Amélie is like stone."

Then she broke into another strain:

"And to think of Wolfenberg's deserting us at such a time!" she said, bitterly. "He has always professed to be Amélie's most intimate friend; and she has just idolized him; and declared to every one that he was the best, the most generous, the most thoughtful, the kindest-hearted of men. Yes; and he goes away over to Paris, to look after pictures, when he must have known that this silence on the part of Hitrovo meant something dreadful——"

"I am certain of this," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with unusual fervour, "that if Mr. Wolfenberg thought he could be of service to either you or Amélie, by being here at this moment, well then, it is here at this moment he would be. That I am certain of!"

She took no heed of this indignant defence.

"Those diamonds—those diamonds!" she went on, driven at last to confession by despair. "That is the terrible thing: you can't help remembering that he took the diamonds with him—that we have heard nothing about either them or him. Not that I value the diamonds a pin-point—no—you won't suspect me of that—when it is Amélie's happiness I am thinking of: it is not the diamonds but the man's character that is at stake—the character of the man she loves, the man she has given her life to. And you," she said, lifting her troubled eyes with a glance half of anxious scrutiny and half of appeal, "whatever appearances may say, don't you think it is perfectly impossible and incredible that he could have taken those diamonds—don't you think it is a perfectly monstrous suggestion—though it may come back and back into your mind?"

The small woman thus addressed was a trifle disconcerted.

"Well," she said, "we had hardly the opportunities of judging of Mr. Hitrovo that you had; but still we saw him from day to day, and we talked with him occasionally, and so on; and certainly he was about the last man in the world whom you would have suspected of being a common swindler."

"Besides," observed a bystander, who had gone to the fire for warmth, "if he had been a common swindler, he would have played his cards to better purpose. If he had been a swindler, it was not the diamonds alone that would have satisfied him."

"You both think so? Oh, I am so glad!" she exclaimed. And then she instantly checked herself—though she was not much of an actress. "Of course," she said, with some affectation of unconcern, "I was merely considering the idea that might occur to an outsider. To us who knew Mr. Hitrovo, and were with him all that time, such an idea is, as you say, perfectly incredible. Perfectly

absurd, indeed." She hesitated for a moment. "And yet his silence is strange."

She rose to go.

"Amélie will be writing to you this afternoon; she has some proposal to make," she said; and then she added timidly: "And you need not tell her I called this morning." Therewith she left—perhaps cheered up a little by this avowal of her hidden and recurrent fears.

But among all the visitors we had at this time—who were increased in number by the fact that Peggy and her sister were staying with us for a while, before going home to Inverfask—none were more welcome than Julian Verrinder's relatives. They came curious to see what Pearl, what Rose, what Treasure the boy had brought home with him from the far East (to be strictly accurate, the Baby was born in Kentucky, which is somewhat westerly) and they remained to be charmed. Our women-folk could show them

other souvenirs of our voyage—Bithynian silks, Turkish embroideries, Rhodian plates, and what not, until it looked as if a sale of bric-à-brac were going forward; but it was the Juno-eyed young maid, with her modest, and grateful, and shyly affectionate ways, that entirely engrossed their attention. And now we discovered why it was that Miss Emily, out of her slender store of pocket-money, had been purchasing various things in the different bazaars and shops—a silver-figured bath-room dress at Broussa, a brass coffee-service at Constantinople, a number of lace handkerchiefs at Malta, and the like. These were no personal acquisitions, to be selfishly hoarded. Not at all. This was for Julian's sister; that was for Julian's mother; we perceived that the Baby had her wits about her, under her prevailing mask of gentleness. And of course there was an immense amount of chatter, at lunch or dinner, about the *Orotania*, and her excellent qualities; until there seemed to

spring up a universal desire to go and repeat this voyage, with perhaps some deviation in the direction of Mycenæ, or Damascus, or Smyrna, or Tunis.

"It was simply delightful all the way through," said Peggy, at one of these small gatherings. "And the wonderful thing was that the people turned out to be so nice! Who minded the dear old Major's growlings—though they did sound rather awful at times—or grudged Sappho her fondling of the pug, that so mysteriously disappeared? Why, out of all those strangers, there were only one or two whom we disliked; and of course they did not know they were disliked. Isn't that a merciful and beautiful provision of nature? I suppose there is no man or woman born who can imagine the reason why he or she should be disliked: they may discover that they are disliked, but they themselves cannot understand why it should be so—therefore the other people are in the wrong.

There was only one thing wanting," she continued. "And that will never be found on a ship until one of our American millionaires starts it on his yacht. There ought to have been stables and horses on board, and a tanned ride made somewhere under cover, so that in wet weather we could have had a gallop round and round——"

"But we never had any wet weather!" the Baby protested; and this simple statement of fact dismissed the wild scheme.

There was an engagement-ring bought about this time: rubies and diamonds: very pretty it was. Then the blushing wearer of that pledge and symbol must needs come secretly to the humble chronicler of these occurrences.

"I wish you would tell me what I ought to get for Julian," she said, shyly.

"Why not ask himself what he would like?"

"Oh, no, no!—I could not do that! It must be a surprise. And I mean something similar to this ring——"

"Something to secure him to you for ever and ever?"

The tell-tale eyes could look grateful enough when they chose.

"There are two ways of doing that. The one way is to get a thick band of gold clasped on to the arm above the elbow; and there it is locked, and you keep the key; he becomes your bondsman and slave for evermore. But that is not a good way. For one thing, it would make him too conspicuous in a Turkish bath. Besides, he could go to a goldsmith's and get the loan of a file. There is a far safer and surer way——"

"Yes?" she says, eagerly.

"It is to determine, resolutely to determine, that you will never, never sulk. Sulking is the fatal thing in married life: the wounds it inflicts never heal."

She seems a little disappointed.

"I meant something more tangible—something he could wear—something quiet and

neat, that he would not be ashamed of," she goes on, with a pretty hesitation. "And yet not quite so expensive as this ring—I could not afford that—though Peggy has been so good to me——"

"And what you are thinking of is a plain, simple, flat gold hoop for the finger, with *Aei* or *Mizpah* on it, in blue enamel; very well; and when you have that already fixed in your mind why don't you say so at once?"

"Will you come with me to help me to choose it?"

"When you have got the size."

"Oh, of course." Then a pause of reflection. "And there will be no secret and no surprise, after all!—if I have to ask him to let me measure his finger. In that case, perhaps—perhaps it would be just as well if Julian went with me to the shop."

"It would be the very best arrangement possible." And therewithal the Baby, looking immensely pleased, stole away to her own

room—no doubt to hold serious consultation with the contents of her money-bag.

The letter we had been promised from Amélie Dumaresq did not arrive; she herself came in its stead, about one o'clock on the following day. And whatever may have been the true object of this visit, outwardly she was in quite a merry mood—the merriment being of a rather hard and forced cast. Moreover she was as impetuous and obstinate and wilful as ever: nothing would do but that we should come away, there and then, to have luncheon with her mother and herself at Glimmer's hotel.

"You say you never go out to lunch: therefore you can have no engagement," she went on, in her blunt and downright fashion. "Then Lady Cameron and her sister having gone to the Crystal Palace—why, it is an opportunity: I really must insist on your taking a little holiday. You have no idea how dull it is for poor Mimsey and me, with

that wicked Ernest hiding himself in Paris, and not even sending us a line. Come, now! I told Mimsey I should fetch you both: I cannot go back without you. It is quite a gay morning—for London; the walk will do you good."

Now in the case of busy people, going out to lunch simply means the destruction of the day; nevertheless, certain promises had been made to Wolfenberg; so at length we yielded, and went. And as we walked along to Glimmer's hotel, this young lady seemed determined to convince us that she was in excellent spirits, light of heart, and careless in mind. It is true that when we reached the hotel, and when she had in a way handed us over to her mother, she subsided somewhat; and a worn and absent look came into her face that we had not noticed there before. At times she would sink into periods of sombre silence; and then again, abruptly recalling herself, would break in upon the conversation

with some petulant and laughing remark. Of course no word was said of Paul Hitrovo; there was even a careful, not to say painful, avoidance of all topics that might lead in that direction. But these were two American ladies, not very familiar with London and London sights: so there was plenty to talk about—apart from dangerous things.

Of a sudden Amélie said—

"Now do you perfectly understand that I cannot allow you to go back home? Oh, no, not at all! Your day is lost. Besides, I can guess what would happen to you. You would be inundated with Orotanians all the afternoon. Instead of that we must go somewhere—we four—by ourselves——" She rose from the table, and went and got a newspaper. After the briefest survey, she continued: "Here is the very thing: a concert at St. James's Hall at three, and ——, the wonderful violinist. That will just do."

The next time the waiter came into the

room, she had a memorandum ready; and a commissionaire was despatched to secure stalls. What did it matter?—the day *was* lost. But if we had known what was going to happen at St. James's Hall that afternoon, not all the violin-playing in the world would have dragged us thither.

We were in good time; the house was not overcrowded; we found our seats easily. And then Amélie, having thus as it were provided for the entertainment of her mother and her guests, appeared to withdraw within herself, relapsing into a profound reverie. She listened to the music, it is true, in a mechanical kind of way; but she hardly seemed to hear. And naturally there was no need for conversation now—nor, indeed, any tolerance of it.

Then, in the most startling way, her attention was aroused; it was as if some sudden blow had awakened her; she raised her head quickly; there was a bewilderment of pain in her eyes. Yet what was this?

Merely that a lady had come forward to the front of the platform, with a sheet of music in her hand; while the bushy-haired gentleman at the piano had begun the prelude to her song. But these notes?—surely we had heard them elsewhere, in far other circumstances? We glanced at the programme—which none of us had thought of examining beforehand: then we knew: it was Tschaikowsky's '*Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt.*'

"Mother—let me get past!—I must go out! —I cannot remain here," said this girl with the pallid face and the wild eyes: she seemed to be trembling with a kind of terror.

"Amélie!"—and there was a hand put on her arm. "You must not! Sit still!"

For indeed this Russian love-song had begun; and she dared not challenge the attention of the audience. Apparently she was trying hard not to listen; she held on through the cruel ordeal, panting breathlessly;

she twisted her programme as if it were a rope of steel. But the instant that the long-thundering applause announced that the song was over, she rose; we made way for her, and went out into the corridor; and thither she came—pale, and quivering like a leaf; and yet, with a wonderful bravery, striving to be firm.

"I am not very well," she said, in choking accents. "I must go back to the hotel——"

"Amélie, the carriage won't be here for an hour!" cried the frightened mother.

"But a cab—cannot we get a cab!" she said, in a sort of despair—as if she were wholly overcome and ready to sink to the ground.

There was no difficulty about that; and presently we were in a four-wheeled vehicle, returning to Glimmer's hotel. But hardly had we set out than the girl seemed to give way altogether. The unnatural proud calm of these last few days, and the forced gaiety of the morning, had alike fled from her; the sound of the Russian song had recalled the

magic nights on the Mediterranean—and revealed her worse than widowed state; and now, careless of who might see or hear, she abandoned herself to a very passion and prostration of grief, and covered her face with her hands, and rocked her body, and wept aloud.

"Amélie!—my darling!" the distracted mother cried—and she tried to seize her hands.

But she took no heed of her or of any one: the tempest had broken.

"Oh, I know—I know," she exclaimed incoherently and recklessly through her sobs. "Do you think I do not understand—why he remains away! It—it is a fine training we—American girls get—freedom and independence—but—but it is not valued on this side. Here—here it is rudeness—insolence: why should he not go away from it! He—he expected to find the Parisian demoiselle—the ballroom débutante—who hardly lifts her eyes—and hardly dares to speak—and is taken

back to her governess after the dance—and —and instead of that he found presumption—boldness—impudence. And—and how could he regard it—but with contempt—and scorn —and what could he do but go away? Go away—yes—when you scorn any one—that is the natural thing to do——"

"Amélie," said the third of the three women, seeing that the mother was too panic-stricken to be of any use. "I am sure you are entirely mistaken. No one could be so foolish as to think that ordinary frankness was rudeness."

The girl seemed to try to pull herself together. After a minute or two of inarticulate sobbing, she said—while her hands fell wearily to her side—"I am so sorry you came away from the concert. Will you not go back? Mother and I can walk on to Glimmer's——"

"Certainly not," was the prompt answer.

"I have not been very well," she pleaded.

"We have been seeing too many sights—and the fatigue——"

"That is it," said Mrs. Dumaresq, eagerly. "I was sure she was doing too much; and when she breaks down, when she has one of these hysterical attacks, you must not heed a single word she says—not a single word. And there's no one can quiet Amélie, and make her mistress of herself, like Ernest Wolfenberg: I do so wish he would come back from Paris!"

With this we arrived at Glimmer's; and when the wan-faced and haggard-eyed creature had been seen to her own room, we returned to the cab and drove home—pondering.

But there were still further and rapid surprises in store for us. Next morning, at the unusual hour of noon, a visitor was announced; and when one went down, it was to discover that Mrs. Threepenny-bit had already received and was now talking with—Ernest Wolfenberg.

"Here is news indeed!" she said, most blithely and cheerfully. "Mr. Hitrovo is in London!—came over with Mr. Wolfenberg last night—or rather this morning; they are at the same hotel; and in the afternoon they are going round to call on the Dumaresqs. I am so glad!—poor Amélie could not understand his silence at all; and now everything will be explained; and she will be as happy as the day is long."

Somehow Wolfenberg did not seem to share these radiant anticipations; his thoughtful face appeared a little concerned and anxious; and yet he laughed as he said—

"How well Amélie understands him! She declared that he would bring back those diamonds in precisely the same condition as when he took them away; and that is just how she will find them this afternoon."

"Oh, he has brought them back untouched?" said the small woman, quickly.

"Quite," he answered her. And then he

added, with a certain carelessness: "I really think she might as well have them re-set in London. She would have better opportunities of overlooking and altering the designs."

Presently Mrs. Threepenny-bit rose and left the room, to carry these cheerful tidings to Peggy; and hardly had the door been shut when Wolfenberg's expression of face underwent a sudden and even startling change.

"Hitrovo had pawned those diamonds!" he said, in a low voice.

"What? Why did you not have him arrested, then?"

"No, no; it was nothing like that," he said, earnestly and hurriedly. "You don't understand. That is the wrong view. There is no criminality or vice about the young man, I am certain; nothing but carelessness and selfishness — and these are not uncommon. Remember his surroundings; the world of sport is his world; debts of honour the first debts to be paid. That's what he went to

Nice for; and these diamonds—they were the property of his future wife—they offered him a ready way of settling up; he borrowed a certain sum on them; and then went on to Vienna, to see about redeeming them. Why, if he had meant stealing the diamonds, he would have taken them on to Vienna with him, and got ever so much more for them! It was an indiscreet transaction, no doubt; still — still — I daresay he imagined that Amélie would not have disapproved; probably he took it for granted that, if he had asked her, she would have lent him the diamonds. It was only a temporary expedient; and then he went on to Vienna to see about the means of redeeming them——"

"Had he redeemed them when you found him?" one ventured to ask.

Wolfenberg looked uneasy.

"Well, no," he said, after a moment's hesitation. And then he added: "To tell you the truth, I had to do that."

"How much?"

"£2,200. But I had some money in Paris; and I managed to get the rest. Oh, that is nothing—that is nothing. That will be all right as soon as I hear from New York: I have written."

"And how much of all this story are you going to tell Amélie?"

"Ah," said he, with traces of strong emotion in his voice, "there is the terrible part of it—the dreadful responsibility. How can I dare to tell her anything, lest she might take the wrong view? If she were to jump to the conclusion that this man had deliberately deceived her—had made away with her diamonds—had cast her off—why, it would kill her: the destruction of her hopes—the outrage to her pride. Do you not see that she cannot be allowed to run the risk of making such a frightful mistake? Yes, for it would be a mistake altogether! He meant none of these things—not deliberately—not

deliberately. But he is easily led away; the present moment is everything to him—— "

He rose and began to pace up and down the room; he was much agitated.

"I suppose," he said, "there is in every one of us a sneak and coward, if you only yield. One night I was lying awake in Vienna. I seemed to hear a voice; and it said 'Why try to get this money to redeem the diamonds? Why persuade Hitrovo to go back with you to London? Go yourself to London. Tell Amélie that this man has befooled her—pawned her diamonds—forsaken her. Then she will cast away from her all this entanglement; you will take your old place by her side; your art-companionship will be resumed; she and you will be together, with all your projects to discuss, and the old and affectionate and happy days will return again—the old and fast and frank comradeship that this Russian came in to destroy.' It was a temptation—a temptation that seemed to tear

one in pieces. But, you see—you see—I might be a sneak and a coward to any one else: I could not be a sneak and a coward to Amélie."

Tears in his voice?—yes, and perhaps in his eyes, for aught one knew. Then he said—with that firmness that he could assume at times—that was, in fact, never far absent from him, even in his most meditative and absent moods—

"Well, I must take the risk. I must accept the responsibility. I will not tell Amélie—nor yet her mother—of these transactions in Nice and Vienna: the danger of misconstruction, of misapprehension, is too desperate. They are women; they might take an exaggerated view altogether; whereas a man can make allowances for Hitrovo's bringing-up, and his occupations, and perhaps a little tendency to self-indulgence and the ease of the present moment. And now that he has shown himself amenable, and capable

of listening to reason and remonstrance—I mean as regards his coming over here, and doing what an honourable man should do—it is fair to imagine that when everything has been satisfactorily settled about the marriage and so forth, all will eventually go well. That will be my justification—as it will be my happiness. But indeed I do not see that I could have acted otherwise. I have tried for the best. And as it was for Amélie's sake, you may suppose I did not spare long and anxious consideration——"

Here the door opened; and he was struck silent.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "DOOMED LOOK."

On one of these afternoons quite a number of our good Orotanians had by chance come together in a certain drawing-room; and their talk was, as usual on such occasions, eagerly reminiscent: a gay babbling that seemed to recall widely diverse scenes—swift-glancing blue-black seas and far rose-grey islands—mysterious nights on deck, with planets burning in the south—spacious harbours, sweltering sunshine, and encircling hills—the palms and pomegranates, the lizard-haunted ruins, the domes and minarets of the East. In the midst of all this a momentary pause occurred; perhaps it was a mere accident, or perhaps the opening of the door drew attention; at all

events the next instant we knew that Mrs. Dumaresq and her daughter were there, followed into the room by Paul Hitrovo, while Mrs. Threepenny-bit was quickly and gladly advancing to bid them welcome. The young lady was no longer broken down, hysterical, trembling-limbed. She came forward with a sort of royal and confident air, as of old; and after a rapid glance of scrutiny directed towards these people, she said—

"Why, this is like getting home to the ship again! One might almost expect to hear the throbbing of the screw and the plash of the waves."

She was looking very well indeed; and she was exquisitely dressed. Her mother, too, seemed pleased and content. Hitrovo remained modestly in the background, until the two ladies had recognised their friends and acquaintances; and then he, also, in his indolent, good-natured way, singled out this one or that for a nod or a more respectful "How

do you do ?" The entrance of those three had caused a certain undefined constraint—it was difficult to say why. But our beloved Sappho came to our aid.

Sappho, when she was interrupted, had been about to tell us of a remarkable scheme of hers ; and now she resumed. It was a project that could only have occurred to a person of powerful imagination and daring genius. She began by telling us of the marvellous, the incredible wealth of Rome at the beginning of the fifth century—the chariots made of solid silver, the innumerable statues faced with plates of gold, and the like. All this incalculable plunder (she said) fell into the hands of Alaric and his Goths when the Sacred City was sacked; and was borne away by them when Alaric, intent on the conquest of Sicily, carried his victorious arms to the South. But Alaric did not conquer Sicily. Scylla and Charybdis played tricks with the van of the expedition ; and Alaric himself died prema-

turely at the little town of Consentia, or Cosenza, under the Calabrian hills. What happened then? His barbarian followers resolved he should have a tomb that the stranger should never rifle; they turned aside the course of the stream that runs by Cosenza; in the empty channel they dug a mighty sepulchre for him, which was made sumptuous by the splendour and riches that Rome had yielded; then they turned the waters back into their ordinary bed; and the grave of Alaric, packed with the spoils of Rome, has remained hidden until this day.

And now we began to perceive what the divine one meant. There was fire, inspiration, enthusiasm in her eye: only a great mind could have conceived such a heroic undertaking. For what those savage hordes from Scythia could accomplish by means of their rude implements was surely easily possible to the skill of the modern engineer; and what more simple than to divert the current of this

small river, to explore its bed in the neighbourhood of Cosenza, to discover the secret sepulchre, and bring its invaluable treasures to the light? No mere lust of gold, but the generous ardour of antiquarian research, would govern and stimulate the new Argonauts. We should behold the gems and jewels with which the Mistress of the World adorned herself, at the time when her unbounded luxury and magnificence and display brought down upon her the swarming multitudes from the Elbe and the Danube. And the means?—as clear as daylight! A promise of 50 per cent. of the treasure-trove—a concession from the Italian Government—something to secure the good-will of the Corporation of Cosenza—and there remained but to decide which Museums should chiefly benefit, and which publisher should have the issuing of the two large octavo volumes.

Now all this was very well; and we were so led away by Sappho's zeal and eloquence

that some of us may have been seriously thinking about taking shares in the Neo-Argonautic Company (Limited) when unfortunately an interruption occurred. There arrived another visitor; and it was the Major. The moment that Sappho caught sight of her enemy, she ceased her harangue; she rose to her feet; caught her muff to her; briefly said good-bye to one or two near her; and then crossed the room to bid farewell to her hostess, who had gone to receive the newcomer. The Major was as debonair as ever. He advanced smiling, bland, rubicund; he shook hands with Mrs. Threepenny-bit; and when Sappho cut him dead—passing him by with an angry majesty, not to say with a half audible snort of rage and contempt—he only stared at her, and observed:

"Dotty old thing!"

What the phrase meant was a puzzle to most of us; but it was an inadvertent remark: it was quite certain he did not mean Sappho

to overhear; and probably she did not overhear.

Wolfenberg was not present on this occasion; but he came to dinner in the evening; and listened with a grave attention to what Mrs. Threepenny-bit had to tell him of her visitors of the afternoon.

"Oh, yes, indeed," she went on (knowing what would please him best of all), "I have never seen Amélie look better, or appear to be in livelier spirits. It was quite like old times—when she used to be the life and soul of our corner of the saloon: do you remember that dear, snug, cosy table—with the brilliant lights — and Amélie's eyes flashing with laughter and merriment? You should have seen how proud and glad her mother was to-day: for once that worn and anxious look seemed to have left her face. Even the Russian," continued this small woman, in her determination to paint a roseate picture, "bestirred himself a little, and was actually com-

plaisant. You know what I have always thought of him, and of his indolent air—as if he expected you to go up to him and entertain him. But this time he really condescended to be amiable; I heard him talking to the Major about the Nice steeplechases; and he gave us a most interesting description of the etiquette of a Court Ball at Vienna—the Archduchess Maria Theresa and the Emperor—the diplomatic corps—the presentations—all very grand. Oh, yes, it was quite cheerful to see Amélie looking so well, and among such happy surroundings."

He did not answer at the moment. But later on in the evening, when the women-folk had gone upstairs to the drawing-room, he said, in a somewhat sombre fashion——

"I wish I could trust all that about Amélie. But I am not sure. She has been so altered of late—and so strange. I am beginning to think that she suspects there was something wrong about those diamonds."

He was staring into the fire—his eyes full of a deep concern.

"You never can tell," he said, presently. "There is nothing she is not capable of, if she is spurred on to it by her pride. Her high spirits of this afternoon: all that may have been bravado, display; she may have been watching each one of you, to discover what you knew, or surmised. I may be mistaken, of course. I hope I am. The whole situation is so critical that one becomes apprehensive—perhaps unduly alarmed——"

And then again he continued, after some seconds of silence:

"I did not tell you of a most unfortunate accident that happened, when Hitrovo and I went round to Glimmer's on the day of his arrival. I took the diamonds with me. Naturally: they had been in my possession all the way from Nice; it never occurred to me to hand them over to him. Nor would it have mattered, either, but for this unlucky

accident: as he and I were going upstairs to the sitting-room, Amélie chanced to be coming down; and we met on the landing. I shall never forget the curious, startled look that came into her eyes when she noticed that I was carrying the casket. You see, it ought to have been in Hitrovo's charge; I had forgotten that. But she said nothing; and in an instant her face was inscrutable; she has a wonderful gift that way, when there is need. And yet, if she suspects that there may have been something wrong—something she dare not ask about—something, too, that she may connect with the absence of any message from Hitrovo when she arrived in London—consider what a terrible position for a girl to be in. If she has even the remotest doubt about the character of the man she has pledged her life to, think what that must be to her in an enforced silence; she durst not confide in any one; her pride would not allow her to ask——"

Then he seemed to try to shake off these gloomy forebodings.

"No, no," he said, "I exaggerate. Mere morbid alarm. Everything must come out all right—because—because—well, if she did suspect that there was something wrong about the diamonds, and if she guessed that I brought them back from Nice, she would naturally come to me; and I should tell her the whole story; and show her there was nothing in it—nothing, that is, beyond a certain carelessness and indiscretion. That is the worst that could happen; and what is that but a trifle? Only—only, I wish Colonel Dumaresq were here."

"Colonel Dumaresq?"

"Amélie's uncle," he said, with some returning confidence. "Mrs. Dumaresq telegraphed to him to come over when she thought I was in Paris; and they appear to be expecting him almost hourly. Yes, that will be a great relief. That will be infinitely

better. For, of course, I cannot advise about monetary matters; and Hitrovo is inclined to be a little urgent — wanting a definite understanding at once. That is clearly a family affair; an outsider like myself could hardly accept the responsibility of advising Mrs. Dumaresq; my share has been limited to bringing Hitrovo along from Vienna——"

"And in saving him from having a very ugly charge preferred against him——"

"Oh, no; no, no," he interposed, with some anxiety. "As I say, that was a mere piece of thoughtlessness. The careless fellow that he is! But on the other hand, if he shows himself sensible of the value of the prize he has won—if he does his best to make Amélie's life happy—we may well overlook small points."

On this same evening a very pretty ceremony took place. When Wolfenberg went upstairs to the drawing-room he carried with him a parcel he had left in the hall; and,

sitting down by a small table on which was a lamp, he proceeded to undo the wrapper.

"This is my sketch of you, Miss Emily; and I want you to tell me how you like the frame," he said.

But it was in the finished drawing, not in the frame, that we all of us were interested; and when the full light of the lamp fell on this portrait of the Baby, it seemed to us that Julian Verrinder was a very fortunate young man indeed. A portrait, yes; but something other and stranger; it was as if, in some inexplicable fashion, one had encountered this beautiful young creature in the dim and vague regions of the dawn, with some mysterious message in the large soft eyes, with the solitude of the cliffs around her, and a murmur of lonely seas. It was a phantom, a vision, full of elusive suggestion; and yet an admirable likeness as well; it was as though our actual, substantial, flesh-and-blood young damsel had come breathless and wondering out of the

realms of sleep—dreams still hanging about her—the world still unfamiliar. And then, amid the universal praise, Wolfenberg said—

"But I have altered the destination of this bit of a sketch. Mr. Julian expects to have it—indeed, he commissioned it; but I have altered all that; I have brought it along for you, Miss Emily, if you will be so kind as to accept it; it is my little wedding present for you."

The Baby's big eyes were filled with dismay.

"Oh, Mr. Wolfenberg, I cannot—it is too valuable——"

"If you think it has any value at all," said he, cheerfully, "so much the better. For then you must take it and let it become part of your dowry."

She hesitated, in great embarrassment.

"Em, can't you say 'Thank you'?" Lady Cameron put in, with some touch of reproach.

Thereupon the tall young maiden, grateful, timid, and shy beyond measure, rose and crossed the room. She held out her hand.

'Thank you, Mr. Wolfenberg!' she said. And therewith, still retaining his hand for a second, she stooped down and touched his cheek with her lips. It was all done so naturally, spontaneously, and gracefully, that there was no room for laughter or derisive comment. Not in the least. The Baby had proved herself the mistress of the situation. We felt that she had done the right thing, at the right moment, and in the right way. Perhaps Wolfenberg was a little bit abashed. But the Baby modestly and quietly returned to her seat; and we were proud of her; in a trying position she had acquitted herself successfully—and that without art or guile.

However, if this somewhat lonely man seemed to take a curious and sympathetic interest in the fortunes of young Julian Verrinder and his sweetheart (before whom the world lay smiling all so pleasantly) he was at this time abruptly summoned back from that kindly contemplation to face the sterner aspects

of life. Colonel Dumaresq came over from Florida. He was a tall, meagre, large-boned man, with a retreating forehead, a heavy jaw, and cold, clear, scrutinising eyes. Moreover, as we speedily learned, he had a short and summary way of dealing with things; and his opinions were definite. It was after the briefest inquiry, and after an equally brief interview with Paul Hitrovo, that he formulated his conclusions; and although we had nothing to do with these—having no wish to intermeddle in a family imbroglio—he announced them to us all the same. The first was to the effect that his sister-in-law was a fool: in fact, when there were no women present, he qualified the noun with an adjective. Hitrovo he declared to be an idle, impudent, worthless fortune-hunter. And he maintained that the only way to cure Amélie Dumaresq of her mad infatuation was to expose ruthlessly before her eyes the true character of the man she had chosen for her husband. There was no kind

of doubt or hesitation in the mind of this tall ex-soldier. He was for prompt measures. He said he had come over just in time.

Wolfenberg listened to all this with an ever-increasing alarm. He begged and implored that nothing rash should be done; urged palliations and excuses for Hitrovo—described his position—his upbringing—the necessity of an establishment; and insisted on the improbability of Amélie having been so entirely deceived.

"He may be selfish—and idle—and inconsiderate—yes; but men are not perfect," he went on. "And Amélie has toleration. She is not a romantic schoolgirl. She may perceive certain defects—without believing him to be nothing but a mere mercenary adventurer. And how can you tell? How can you judge of his character?——"

"How can I tell?" the other repeated. "Well, I go by what a man says to me about himself—when there's no better authority.

And if a young fellow—who is none so young either—if he coolly informs you of the price he puts on himself—as consideration for marrying a girl—you can size him up pretty straight. It is frankness on his part, that is; it is a kind of frankness that seems to suggest some one's being kicked out of the house. That is how it presents itself to my mind."

"Colonel Dumaresq, for Amélie's sake, be careful what you do!" Wolfenberg pleaded again, earnestly. "It is the great crisis of her life. You may do irreparable harm. If you quarrel with this young man, he may go away and leave her altogether——"

"Which I think is about the best thing he could do," observed the soldier, calmly.

"What!" Wolfenberg exclaimed. "Have you considered what that would mean to a proud and sensitive girl like Amélie?"

"Mr. Wolfenberg," said Colonel Dumaresq, with an odd sort of smile, "you seem very anxious to see Amélie married."

Wolfenberg looked startled—and there was some flush of colour in his pale and thoughtful face.

"And yet she used to write to me a great deal about you—and her chivalrous scheme of a life-companionship—working together—and scorning matrimonial ties. I hope it is not because you have abandoned these fine schemes that she has been left to take up with this worthless scamp——"

"Oh, no; oh, I think not," Wolfenberg said, hurriedly. And then he added: "Amélie knows that I myself, and my ways of life, and anything and everything I can command—all are at her service, always."

"Yes, I honestly believe that," was the response—uttered in no unkindly fashion. "And I am afraid you have been only too good to her. A little firmer treatment may be needed to bring her to her senses."

"Take care—take care," was Wolfenberg's final word of warning on this occasion. "It

is a beautiful rich life you have to deal with—a life with splendid possibilities—and surely happiness in marriage should be one of these; but a single false step might be fatal. If you were to bring calamity instead of succour, if you were to give sorrow instead of joy, could you ever forgive yourself?"

This was the last we saw of Colonel Dumaresq for a day or two; but through Wolfenberg we heard what was going on. Negotiations for a marriage settlement were supposed to be proceeding; but they were strange negotiations with Hitrovo, on the one side, remaining obdurate and coldly indifferent, and with Colonel Dumaresq, on the other side, mainly concerned in procuring evidence to convince Amélie of the utterly selfish and venal nature of the man to whom she had linked herself.

"And he is succeeding," Wolfenberg said to us one night. "Do you remember the look on her face when she arrived at Tilbury and

found that Hitrovo had failed to keep his appointment? It was a doomed look, as I thought; and she has worn it, more or less, ever since—though she imagines her mask is impenetrable. I am certain that she suspects there was something wrong about the diamonds; perhaps she may even guess that I had some difficulty in persuading Hitrovo to come to London. And yet none the less her courage remains wonderful. Every day the perfectly callous and despicable character of this man is becoming clearer and clearer—yes, I will confess it—it is no use blinding one's-self to facts—I defend him no more—I make no more excuses—I have given up all desire to smooth things over; and yet even now she laughs, and talks of a conspiracy on the part of her relatives to drive away her lover because he has the misfortune to be poor. But she sees what he is—and there is despair at her heart."

He sate for a minute or two in profound reverie: then he said—

"And to think that this should have come to Amélie—of all the people in the world. Do you remember her as you first saw her?"

Indeed we did: we could recall the gay and imperious creature, splendidly gifted, brimful of laughter, vitality, happiness—the kind of creature to bid the Fates stand aside from her path of enjoyment and triumph. And had we not noticed, also, the successive steps, subtle and stealthy, by which she had been overtaken?—until this was the end: a woman haggard-eyed, with a 'a doomed look' on her face—her lover false—her friends not daring to offer sympathy, because of her fierce pride.

And yet we were not prepared for the news that reached us a couple of days thereafter. Our women-folk, happening to be in the neighbourhood of Glimmer's hotel, called on the Dumaresqs; and were shown upstairs. But it was Wolfenberg who came down to the sitting-room; and he seemed agitated.

"There has been an accident," he said,

quickly, "—to Amélie; and Mrs. Dumaresq wishes me to explain. Oh, nothing very serious—we hope not—the doctors say it rarely happens that any ill effects remain, if remedies have been applied promptly—and in Amélie's case they were—immediately after the accident——"

He paused for a second, to collect himself.

"You see, Hitrovo left England for good the day before yesterday; and no doubt Amélie was a little upset; and—and she may have thought a little opium would procure sleep for her: then it is so easy to take an over-dose—so simple and ordinary a mistake. But she is all right now—though it was serious at first—they sent for me at three o'clock this morning, at the same time that they sent for the doctor; and for several hours one hardly knew what to fear. But now—oh, yes, she is steadily improving—and there won't be any after-effects, the doctors think—except that she will be a little more careful in the future

to guard against such an accident. Mrs. Dumaresq asks if you would care to go up—and say a word to Amélie—and cheer her——"

But the two callers naturally and properly excused themselves; left many messages; and came away. For a space—as one afterwards heard—they walked in silence. Then said Mrs. Threepenny-bit to her companion:

"Poor Amélie! You can guess what has happened, Peggy—and the tragic pity of it. For with all her gifts and graces, and her audacity, and nerve, and courage, it has always seemed to me that she was at bottom little else than an impetuous and ungovernable spoilt child; and now, I suppose, the moment she found that life was not altogether what she hoped and wished, she spurned it, and would have thrown it away. And Wolfenberg: he must understand: think what his position must be! I am glad the room was in twilight—I should not have cared to meet his eyes."

CHAPTER IX.

THE YOUNG BRIDE.

MIDNIGHT: the house asleep and still: only one room downstairs remaining occupied. There comes a knocking at the outer door—no ringing of the bell, nor yet any loud alarum, but a gentle tapping with the back of the hand. And when one goes along to discover what this can mean, it is Wolfenberg who is found to be without.

"I saw the light; and guessed you were not in bed. May I come in for a few minutes?"

There was something strange about his manner; his face was drawn and pale; his eyes had a sort of blind look in them. And when he entered the room, and sate down, he seemed to be hardly aware of his surroundings.

"I hope you won't mind," he said, in a low voice—a voice that was also curiously impassive. "I have been walking about the streets—until I saw your windows—and then I thought I should like to speak to you."

"Yes: and how is Amélie?"

"Amélie?" he repeated, as if thinking of some one remote. "Amélie—is well. She is dead."

He spoke coldly and collectedly. One could only stare at this man who appeared to be labouring under some kind of paralysis—as though he had been deprived of perception and feeling by some overwhelming blow.

"Two hours ago," he said. "Two hours ago she went away: leaving the world—what it has become. What it has become—what it holds now—with her gone out of it: I cannot face that yet. For two hours——" He shivered slightly as he spoke; though the night was not cold—"For these two hours I have been trying to understand; but the

difference will come to us gradually, day by day, I suppose. At first—at first there is only darkness and bewilderment. For a while I stayed with her mother—but since then—I have been going through the streets—until I saw the light in your windows—I thought you would not mind if I came in for a few moments."

He spoke quite humbly. He seemed somehow dazed. One could only ask him questions to keep him talking: that promised most relief.

"A little more than two hours ago," he said—and then he paused as if seeking to recall the scene—"she was laughing and chatting—or trying to laugh and chat. That was her wonderful courage—to the very end. She was determined to hide from her mother and her uncle what she had suffered over Hitrovo's going; she would have them believe that the over-dose of opium had been a pure accident; so she went on talk-

ing in this way—pretending she was anxious to take up her painting again—speaking, as well as she could speak, of going back to the Atelier Didron. Her fortitude, her pluck, was wonderful—when you knew how she was situated—what she had endured —what she was enduring. There never was a girl as brave as that girl—with a dagger in her heart all the time. Do you know this," said he, looking up with the strangest pitifulness in his eyes, "that she asked for Rubinstein's song, '*Gelb rollt mir zu Füssen*'—I knew why—it was to show she could mention Hitrovo's name without a trace of emotion. And I began to think that such courage, such inflexible courage, might even yet carry her through the years of her life, and sustain her, and patch up some kind of a future for her. But the Fates are merciless—merciless."

He hung his head again.

"Two hours ago," he went on, in slow and sombre tones, as if he were thinking aloud,

"and there was still that possibility. Amélie was alive and with us—there was a future—perhaps some little making up for what she had suffered in the past. And then—she was lying propped up and warm in bed—and we had no thought of any danger—it was about the Atelier Didron she was talking from time to time—and then—then, of a sudden, there was a look of fright in her eyes—she gasped out 'Ernest! Ernest!'—she put her hand quickly to her heart—and sank back on the pillow: it was all over even before her mother could catch her in her arms. I hardly know what happened after. But by and by I got away. The mother was frantic—I could do nothing. I left the uncle with her. I have been wandering through the empty streets—anywhere. I do not understand it yet—Amélie—away from us. It is to-morrow—to-morrow—that I fear. But Amélie has nothing more to fear now. She never did fear anything."

There was in this stunned and almost apathetic impassivity something more terrible than any outcry of sharp anguish. Then he rose to go—with further and humble apologies for intrusion, as if these were needed. But he was easily persuaded to remain : he appeared to have no volition—to have become a mere wreck of himself, drifting he knew not, and cared not, whither. Presently he took an envelope from his pocket.

"I do not know what your English law demands," he said, in a hopeless kind of way. "This was her last message to me—not to-night—she must have written it last night before—before what her mother still thinks was an accident. I found it waiting on the hall-table when they sent for me at three o'clock this morning, though I did not open it for hours after : we were too much alarmed about Amélie's condition. Perhaps you ought to read it. There are no secrets in it—other than what you know or must have guessed."

In a mechanical sort of fashion he handed over the sheets of paper; and then returned to his seat, allowing his head to sink between his shoulders, his eyes staring blankly before him, apparently without observation. He seemed hardly to know where he was, indeed. The appalling suddenness of the blow had entirely crushed and prostrated him; he had had no time as yet to collect his faculties; so far as he could think, he was thinking back—the visions of many years before his gaze, ending with that tragic scene he had but so lately quitted. And further than that, onward, he appeared unable to go: he had turned shudderingly from a contemplation of the coming day, and all it might mean.

This was a long letter, written hastily, but not (judging by the ink) consecutively. Perhaps she had been interrupted: perhaps new ideas had occurred to her that she was forced to add. Thus it ran:

"My best, and dearest, and truest of friends,

I am now bidding you farewell: this is my last message to you. Whether it is a farewell for ever, or only 'until the dawn comes,' who can say? You never seemed to care to speak of such matters: I suppose you considered them too high and terrible to be talked about; I could see that you let the conventionalities of ordinary speech go by unquestioned. And perhaps that was the wiser way; if people could realise the mysteries surrounding life, life itself would become impossible; an unimaginative world has got to work. But now that I am face to face with these problems, I have no fear: instead of looking forward, and questioning, I am looking back—to you, Ernest. And if you were here now, I would go down on my knees before you, and stretch up my hands to you, and beg for your forgiveness. Oh, I know what you would say—out of your boundless generosity and self-forgetfulness; but I know also what I have done—I see it more and more clearly,

now that I am leaving you. I can see how miserably I have failed—what a traitor I have been—how easily I was led away. A traitor—yes!—for the pledges were given, though they were not always declared. There was to be consolation and companionship; you were to be my more than brother—my twin soul; and long years were to prove that our alliance, in affection, in pursuits, in living our lives together, had only grown more simply natural and more assured. And then—— But I cannot write down my own shame. It has brought its own punishment with it—a punishment far more bitter than any one has been allowed to know. Can you believe it, Ernest, that in talking to my uncle he dared to use the word *compromised*—about *me*—*I* was *compromised*—and therefore they were bound to accede to his demands. Oh, the shame of it!—the shame of it! Well, it is of little consequence now; pride must go now; and vanity; and all the old desire of

figuring in exhibitions; and every other desire save that of making some reparation to you: that must remain with me to the end, however hopeless it may be. Too late—too late.

"And yet, if there is consciousness after death, I should like to know that you had forgiven me. Some night, if you were to say aloud 'Poor Amélie! her life went all wrong somehow; but she tried to be my friend—before the wreck and ruin came'—then perhaps I should hear. And if there is this possibility, I shall not have long to wait; I know that; you never did refuse me anything. Now when it is too late my eyes are opened. Good friend, true friend: I wonder if there ever was in the world a man so self-sacrificing as you, so self-forgetful as you, so unswerving in affection, through many changes. Do you think I have not understood all you have done and were trying to do for me in this later time—about the diamonds—and your bringing him back from Vienna—refusing to

believe what you would rather not believe—hoping against hope—working, contriving, making excuses, as long as there remained a single chance. And so it was from the very beginning of our friendship. For me everything; for you nothing; every thought for me—not one turned towards yourself. And what a requital!—more shame and shame heaped upon my head— But it is not you, Ernest, who will point the finger of reproach—ah, not you!—not you! I cannot write more. My uncle will look after mother. If they only knew the agony I have suffered in pretending not to suffer—the agony of this affectation of indifference or cheerfulness, when there was nothing but despair in my heart—they would not ask me to endure it longer—they could not be so inhuman as to ask me to endure it longer. So farewell, Ernest. Good friend, dear friend, good-bye! My last thought is of you.

"Your repentant and heart-broken Amélie."

Just as mechanically as he had handed over these two sheets he received them back again; and then he went to the fire, and put them on the coals, and watched them burn.

"I do not know what your English law demands," he repeated; "but I think I am doing right. I do not suppose there will be any inquiry: the doctor says her death was due to sudden failure of the action of the heart. It is a good phrase. The heart may well cease to act—when it is broken."

And then he came back; and in a more excited, and even half-demented way, he said—

"Can you imagine it—can you imagine it!—to happen to Amélie! You remember her. You saw her for a while. You saw how brilliant she was—how active and eager and resolute—how full of a gay enjoyment of life. You remember how her presence—her strong vitality—was felt, without an atom of assertion on her part: it was the fascination of

one who was so abounding in gifts, whose future interested and attracted, because of its splendid possibilities. And now—think of her: in that room. But it is the old, old story. This one and that, here and there, seems marked out. The Fates are remorseless —remorseless. The overtaking steps may be slow or swift, but they are sure. Yet why should she have been singled out?—why not some castaway like myself?—if there were such a thing as substitution, that would have been a joy to me—the welcomest fate that ever man met. If only Amélie could have been left, with something like happiness. But it was too late for that, I suppose. Her life was all broken. There was an end to the possibilities of the future. And now—now she is at peace."

And then again he returned to his seat; and went on talking of bygone days—seeing in pictures, as it were, and always with her as the central figure. The half-hours passed.

He did not notice that in the thinner portions of the festooned blinds the yellow glow of the lamps was being encountered and checked by the grey light without.

"Why do you ask of my plans?" he said, incidentally, amid this rambling and half-distracted monologue. "What do I care? But forgetfulness is a desirable thing. Perhaps it is of all things the most desirable. What greater good is there than health?—and that means forgetfulness. When your body is in perfect working order, you forget that you have a body; when your brain is sound and well, you are not conscious of any process of thinking. It is only pain that attracts attention to this or that limb, to this or that function. And were I to aim at forgetfulness—at forgetfulness of bygone grief—I know where I should seek it: I should seek it in looking at the big, wide things of the world—the ocean, the sky, the distant coast-lines. These are the soothing

things; they seem to say that forgetfulness will come soon enough to all of us."

The light in the windows grew—so that the lamps were paler. But he did not heed. Presently he said——

"I have heard you speak of your greater project. And there is a kind of fascination in the idea of sailing round the world, with glimpses of the land only at long intervals. Lady Cameron said she was sure she could induce her husband to go. And that beautiful young creature, her sister—she will be a bride then: to see her and her young husband together—to be merely a spectator of the happiness shining in those soft eyes of hers—that ought to be something. You will have a pleasant party—light-hearted—merry: you would not care—of course—you would not care—to have tacked on to you—a kill-joy—a castaway—one of fortune's un-favourites——"

Was it necessary to assure him how he

would be welcomed—and with what discretion of silence—by that small company of intending voyagers?

"The big elemental things of the world," he continued, in an absent way, "bring peace: the sea—the sky—the distant shores. And I do not think you need fear much; I should try not to be a kill-joy; one would not bring sorrows and griefs to scatter in the pathway of a young bride. Oh, no, no, no; Mrs. Julian—she will be Mrs. Julian then—need not be afraid. It is laughter and smiles that should accompany a young bride; and I should—I should try to remember that—if I were allowed to go with you——"

Of a sudden his eyes were attracted to the windows: they were white now: the new day was here. And for a second he seemed to shrink away in dread—as if the world outside were filled with terrible things, that had once again to be encountered. But this man had courage, too. His eyes might be wistful and

given to dreams; the lines of his mouth told of a sufficient firmness should the occasion demand. He rose; made some needless and needlessly humble apologies; and proceeded to take his leave. When the door was opened the empty world without was filled with light —a light not more wan and pallid than the face that now confronted it. Then he disappeared; and the grey pavements were silent once more.

And thus it was (so strangely intertwisted are the strands of human existence—the shimmering gold of anticipation and desire; the blackness of bereavement and despair; the tragic loneliness and sorrows of age; youth's rose-hued hopes and eager ambitions—so strangely complex is the warp and woof of that surrounding mystery to which men have given the name of life, but of which they know so little) thus it was that a few months thereafter a sufficiently vivacious and light-hearted set of

folk once again stood upon the decks of a great steamer, as she was about to set out, by long ocean-stages, to girdle the world. Here was our beloved Peggy, serene, radiant, good-humoured; rather regretting that she had not the Major to fetch and carry for her; but perhaps content to do without Sappho and her unnumbered agonies and woes. Here, also, was Cameron of Inverfask, grumbling a little that he should be dragged away to hot climates again, when he had been looking forward to throwing a "Childers" or a "Thunder-and-lightning" over the dark, oily, tea-brown pools, amid the silver gleams and purple glooms of the wild March weather, under the hanging birch-woods, where the black-cock sends forth his challenge from among the withered and russet bracken, and the thrush, in the quiet of the evening, sings loud and clear from his solitary bough. Here, also, was Julian Verrinder, out of his mind with pride over his most recent and most rare and precious acqui-

sition; but nevertheless professing the habits and customs of an experienced husband by keeping away from his wife and almost ostentatiously leaving her to other people. And here was the tall, shy young thing herself—none the less bashful because of all her blushing honours—so grateful for any notice taken of her—so desperately anxious to make a friendly impression with her large, pleading eyes. Then there was our Mrs. Threepenny-bit—alert—animated—ubiquitous—swift of direction—petulant—domineering—and just daft with delight over this setting forth. She was quite impatient to have the last of the strangers sent away ashore.

There was another figure here, distinct, though not apart. It was Wolfenberg. His hair had become quite white during these intervening months. But there was nothing of the whiner—nothing of the self-pityer—that most contemptible of all God's creatures

—about this man. He could still hold a resolute front; fearing no dint of fortune that might befall; ready to 'take the world for his pillow,' like another. Nay, at this moment, when our women-folk were naturally a little nervous and excited over the setting out on so long a voyage, he was endeavouring to calm them, to distract their attention, by talking deliberate nonsense to them. Absolute nonsense—grave absurdities—*à propos* of nothing in the whole wide universe; but Peggy had to listen; and so much was gained. She was being assured that of all existing professions, trades, and employments, that of the tailor was the noblest; "because," said he, "man is the only animal born into the world without a proper protection against the climate; and the tailor steps in to provide what Providence forgot." Again she was being reminded how curiously habits survive—how paupers in a workhouse, when they become perfectly

desperate, rend their garments just as the Jews of old used to do. And then again——

"Clear away that gangway!" was called from above.

Whereupon Wolfenberg turned to the Baby, who had been listening in her quiet, respectful, modest way; and he made bold to place his hand within her arm.

"Mrs. Julian," he said, "I have a great favour to ask of you. We shall be going down directly to have our places at table arranged. Now will you let me sit next you? You see, your husband cannot be allowed to monopolise you altogether; he must sit opposite you, where he can look at you as much as he pleases; but if you would let me have the seat next yours——"

"Oh, Mr. Wolfenberg," said the poor Baby, "you wouldn't care to talk to *me!*"

"What's that—what's that?" he said, good-naturedly. "Why, you don't seem to have

any idea of your own importance! Don't you know that you are the most important personage on board this ship? Don't you know that a young bride brings luck? And what is more, Mrs. Julian, I'm going to ask you, not only to 'lend me your ears,' but also to lend me your eyes—all through this voyage."

She glanced at him inquiringly.

"Yes, I am going to try to see things as you must see them," he went on; "and then everything will be new and fresh and wonderful. Youth and happiness ought to make a fine pair of rose-coloured spectacles; and you must lend me a little of the magic——"

The screw began to revolve; it was a sound that sent a thrill of anticipation through many a heart. He turned again to the beautiful and gentle young creature who stood by his side—and who had made no kind of effort to remove his hand from her arm.

"We are off now," he said to her, cheer-

fully enough. And then he added, in his grave and kindly fashion: "And where do you think a young bride should be bound for—if not for the Cape of Good Hope?"

THE END.

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